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ADVENTURE
June 10th, 1922

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Volume 35
Number 1

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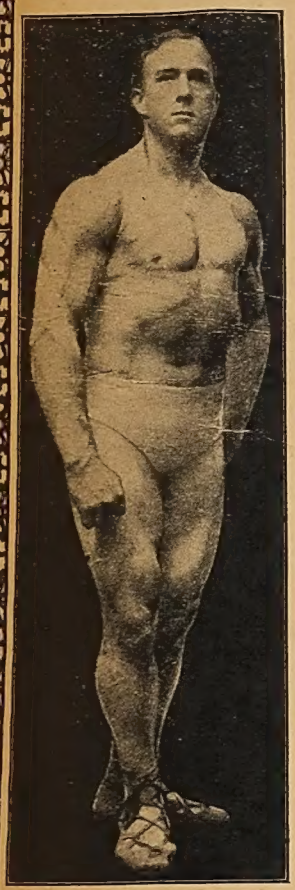

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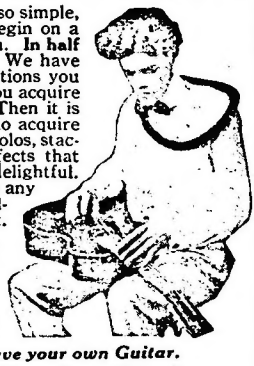

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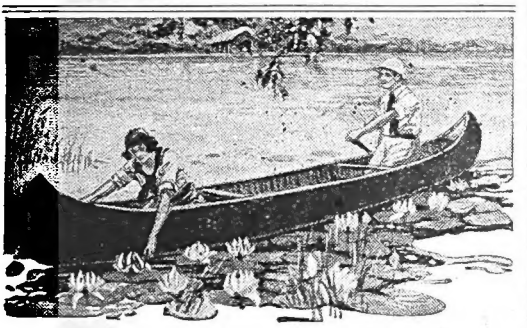

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Contents for June 10th, 1922, Issue

Flotsam *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **J. Allan Dunn** 3
China Sea—piracy and kidnaping.

The Law of Averages in Music Creek . . . . . **W. D. Hoffman** 37
California—and the lure of '49.

The Charm . . . . . **L. Patrick Greene** 47
Rhodesia—black and white magic.

War Wampum *A Five-Part Story Part I* . . . . . **Hugh Pendexter** 63
Colonial America—*Pontiac* digs up the hatchet.

Venty . . . . . **Charles Victor Fischer** 89
The sea—a "voice" at large.

Long Knives and Short . . . . . **H. H. Birney, Jr.** 101
Old frontier—with Indians on the war-path.

A Shot at a Venture *A Three-Part Story Conclusion* . . . **Captain Dingle** 108
Papua—the search for the golden footstool.

(Continued on next page)

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

Cheechako Luck . . . . . **Wilbur Watkins** 142
Alaska—Fortune's ways are unforeseen.

The Net . . . . . **Harold Lamb** 150
The Yenesei—Buriat *vs.* Russian.

Explain It Yourself . . . . . **Thomson Burtis** 158
U. S.—Army aviation.

Once a Popular Dance *A Bit of Indian Lore* . . . . . **H. P.** 174

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 175

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 182

Ask Adventure 183

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 185

Weapons, Past and Present 185

Fishing in North America 185

Mountains and Mountaineering 185

Lost Trails 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . . **Bernard Westmacott**

Cover Design . . . . . **Charles Durant**

A FRIEND is in distress—and *Don Everhard*, gambler and gun-fighter, responds with all his resources of quick-wittedness, courage and acquaintanceship in the underworld of the Pacific coast. "CROOKED SHADOWS," a complete novelette, by Gordon Young, in the next issue.

OUT of Africa comes a package containing an old diary and in it the story of men of different races and ages, held captive by the blacks for sacrifice and worship. "GIFTS OF DIAMONDS," a novelette by Charles Beadle, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

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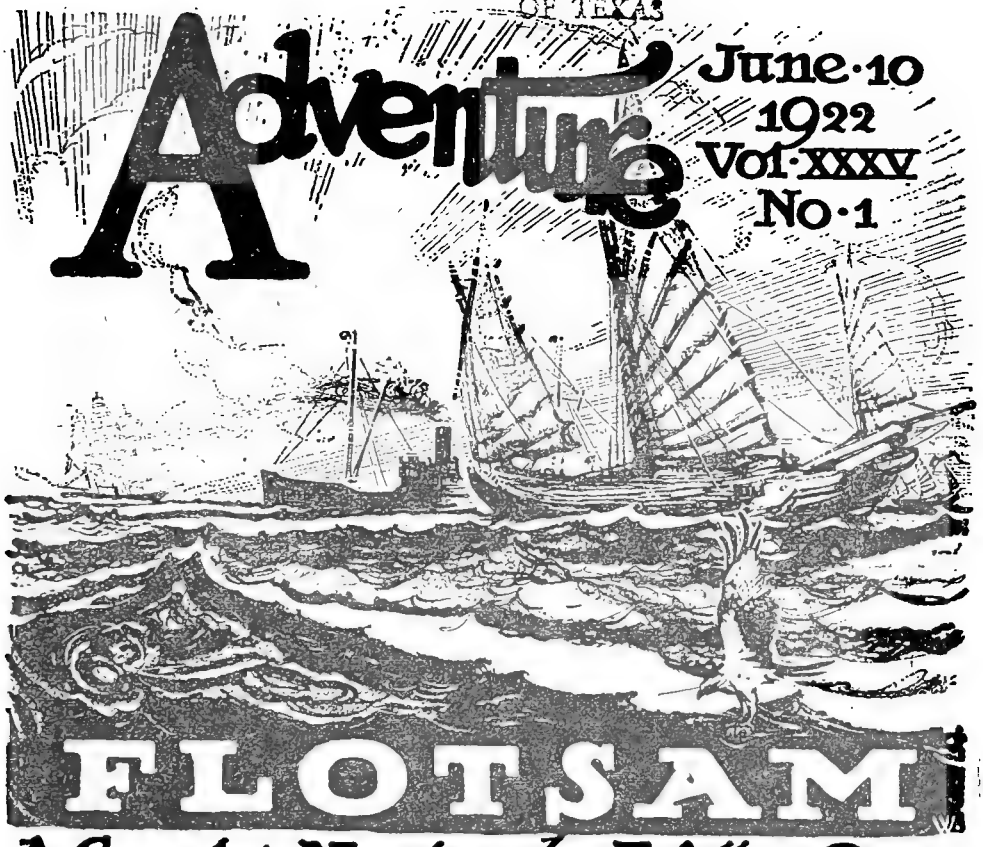

FLOTSAM

A Complete Novelette by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Forced Luck," "Plunder," etc.

THE engineer reached for the last of the *samshu*, but the mate was the quicker, spilling the rice wine into a cracked cup and flinging it down his throat while Menzies surveyed him dourly.

O'Connell laughed, smacked his lips and began to clean his pipe-stem with a pigeon's feather he had picked up in the street. As the thrice-distilled spirit mellowed him—he had drunk most of the bottle—he began to sing in a husky, sweet baritone with a lilt to the chanty that made you see—willy-nilly—the sailors pushing at the pawls, straining on the ropes as they sheeted home. Willy-nilly the fingers of the grouchy Menzies tapped time to the melody.

"Don't you hear the old man roarin', Johnny?
One more day!
Don't you hear that pilot bawlin', Johnny?
One more day!
Only one more day, my Johnny,
One more day!
Oh, come rock an' roll me over.
One more day!"

He sucked at the pipe, which would not draw, and started to scrape the bowl with his pocket-knife, changing his rhythm with the task:

"To Tiffany's I took her,
I did not mind expense;
I bought her two gold earrings
That cost me fifty cents.
And a-a-away, you santee! My dear Annie!
Oh, you New York girls, can't you dance the polka!

Says she, 'You limejuice sailor,
Now see me home you may;'
But when we reached her cottage door
She unto me did say:
'And a-a-away, you santee!' My dear Annie!
Oh, you New York girls, can't you dance the polka!"

The swelling bellow of "a-a-away" woke up the captain, dozing in his decrepit lounging

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chair of broken bamboo. The room was filled with shadows from the ill-wicked, badly trimmed hanging lamp with its smoke-blotched chimney. The four built-in bunks along two of the walls were barely touched with light. In one of them—a lower—the supercargo was sleeping off the last effects of opium, sprawled on his back, one chalky, dirty hand lolling over the sideboard of his bunk.

The light was kind to Captain Boyd. One might almost imagine him as he had once presided at the head of the liner's table—before he lost his ship—courteous, efficient, handsome with his strong features and the rich tan of his skin against the silver of well-trimmed hair and beard, square shouldered and erect in his gold-bedecked uniform.

The light was kind to his straggling beard, the awry strands of thinning hair, the broken veins on cheek and nose, the mouth sagging under the unkempt mustache, the greasy stains on the gilt-buttoned coat he wore, despite the closeness of the room with its one open window giving on to a blank wall of brick not two feet from the sill. Up through this narrow court floated the odors of Chinese community cooking, rice and bean sauce, scraps of pork, entrails of fowls, onions.

Menzies, the engineer, in grimy shirt-sleeves, was horse-faced with a prodigious nose and a bald head scantily ringed with wiry ginger locks. His neck was gaunt as that of a plucked fowl but his paunch was enormous. His official ratings had long since been dissolved in strong liquors so far as Shipping Boards and Commissioners were concerned.

Brownbill—dishonest supercargo—snoozing in the bunk, was the smallest of them, a London sparrow of a man. In more prosperous days he had dyed his hair to conceal his age. Now the gray showed in patches like the hide of a badger and his weedy little body was emaciated. His face was pinched, haggard, waxen with use of opium, lined with a web of wrinkles. His shifty eyes, unpleasantly half open as he lay, were green flecked with russet, and there was a scar across his chin where a broken bottle had been thrust into his face by a cheated trader.

O'Connell was the man of the quartet when it came to physique and virility, battered as he was from his wanderings up and down the earth and sea, an uncredited, unsung, disreputable edition of Ulysses. Gaunt now from lack of good food, his slop-serge hung on his big skeleton as on a rack, but there was the twinkle of humorous devilment in his blue eyes—a little faded but bold alike to women and to men. Mate, stevedore, prospector, gambler, diver, prize-fighter, soldier of the Foreign Legion; broken-boned, knife-slashed and bullet-scarred; he still faced the adverse fates with a grin.

Flotsam of the sea were the four of them. Only within the last week had they known each other, save by unsavory reputation. They had never served together. They were all four discredited, disrated, discharged, cashiered, cast out of conventional and civilized communities. Almost derelict—flotsam of the sea—caught by the same whirling eddy of misfortune and now drifting between tides in the deadwater of a back room above the *godown* of Wong Fu Li, merchant of Macao.

O'Connell's song shifted once more as he began to pack his pipe with tobacco, his voice sirupy with sentiment.

"I kissed her on her ruby lips, she kissed me back again.
To think of parting with me made her tears run down like rain.
Singin', Blow ye winds in the mornin'!
Blow, ye winds, hi, ho!
Brush away the mornin' dew,
Blow, ye winds, hi, ho!"

There was true melody in the old sea-song, there was the pain of loving and of parting. O'Connell's mocking eyes were moist.

"The last time I sang that," he said, reaching for a match, "was in Pernambuco. She— Oh, well, what the ——?"

The captain nodded.

"'Tis all past, O'Connell. We're all come to the bitter end of the cable. The rope is sliding from the bitts and we're on the lee shore of age—adrift. I was wondering if—but it don't matter."

He ended with a sigh, his beard low on his chest. Picking up a pack of dog-eared cards, he began to shuffle them.

"We're no adreeft yet," broke in Menzies' rasping voice. "If ye think Wong has been providin' us room an' grub, not to mention *samshu*—and *yen hok* for Broonbill—all for nothing, ye're mistaken. He's got a use for all four o' us. Probably in some nefarious employ, but I'm as bare of scruples

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as a toad is of feathers. That's my——"

Brownbill began to snore with terrific gasps and chokings.

"Turn the little de'il on his side," snapped Menzies, and O'Connell shifted the position of the supercargo as easily as if he had been handling a child.

The snoring ceased and O'Connell relit his pipe.

"Menzies is nigh the mark," he said. "Skipper, dear, ye've got the megrims. 'Sure, 'tis from bein' cooped up in this bit of a room. Ye need the winds o' the mornin' blowin' fresh an' free. To get to sea again. An' that's where we'll all be before long. Wong's had his eye on all of us for quite a while, without doubt. When the time come he collected us with the offer of bed an' board an' strong liquors. Sooner or later we'll pay for the hospitality.

"What's Wong after? Contraband or piracy, I'm thinkin', an' I'm not givin' a yelp in —— which. Fill my belly an' give me a deck to walk on, a bunk to sleep in, an' maybe a *haikwan tael* or so to jingle, I'm satisfied, if not contented. To my mind we four are to give a film of respectability in appearance to cover up whatever deviltry Wong's up to, or he'd be content with a crew of chinks an' half breeds. Wong plans to play monkey. We're his catspaws. So be it. Faith, I'm old enough to keep clear of the scorch an' cop a chestnut or two for myself! Oh—

> "A dollar a day is a Hoosier's pay.
> Lowlands, lowlands, a-away, my John!
> Yes, a dollar a day is a Hoosier's pay;
> My dollar an' a half a day.

"But I'm no Hoosier. What's wrong, Menzies?"

The engineer was scowling. The atmosphere of the room was charged with suppressed irritation that seemed to pervade even the snores of Brownbill and showed in the shaking hands of Captain Boyd as he laid out his Canfield.

"You don't like my singin', Menzies? Ye've no music in your soul. 'Tis because ye're a below-decks man. The heat of the boilers has dried up your sentiment."

"I'd stand better for your singin', 'gin I'd had my fair share of the *samshu*."

"We'll make Ching bring an extry bottle. I know how you feel, Menzies. If I didn't sing I'd probably wring the neck of Brownbill. He's snorin' again. It's the waitin' an' the bein' broke. I— Come in!"

The door opened and the managers of the *godown*, caterer and landlord to the quartet, entered silently on felt soles, smiling blandly while his slant-eyes took in every detail of the room, the greasy dishes of the previous meal, the empty bottles of *samshu*, the progress of the game of solitaire, Brownbill's second-hand opium outfit on a chair by the bunk.

Ching Kee was dressed in blouse and pantaloons of indigo silk. His sleek, placid face was as unwrinkled and bore as little expression as an egg. He bowed, his hands hidden in long cuffs. In some indefinable way he suggested contempt for the white men. It was as if he—a knight moved in strategy by the masterly hands of Wong Fu Li—considered these victims of their own follies as mere pawns, less free of action, more likely of sacrifice.

"Goo' mo'ning, gen'l'men. The Honnable Wong Fu Li say he like to speak along of all of you this afte'noon, if you please. You go along his house. Fi' o'clock, if you please. Suppose you no *sabe* where, I show you."

O'Connell, bristling mentally, sensing Ching's attitude, infused into his voice all the disdain of the Celt for the coolie.

"All right, Ching. You send up one more bottle of *samshu*. Chop-chop!"

"I send. You go?"

"We go. Now you go."

Ching, already at the door, bowed and made the courtesy appear a screen to cover derision. He closed the door noiselessly. O'Connell winked at his companions, enjoining silence with a finger to his lip. Presently he nodded.

"He's gone now. There's the stair. Sixth from the top. It creaks. He was listenin'. Maybe Wong's orders, maybe his own idea. No sense in his knowin' too much. No sense in his knowin', or Wong, by the same token, how much we know of Cantonese or Portygese lingo."

"It wouldn't matter wi' me," said Menzies. "I'm no hand at dialects."

"Nor me," said Boyd, putting away the cards in their cover.

"I'm pretty pat with Cantonese an' Mandarin myself," said O'Connell. "And Brownbill spills languages like the supercargo he is. Might come in handy some day. There's the stair again. 'Tis the

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samshu. I'll wake up Brownbill. We've got none too much time to spruce up."

Job-loose as they were, there was small question of precedent among them. O'Connell took a natural lead where specialized skill was not demanded. The prospect of action had given them all a flare of spirit, including Walker, awakening dull and moody. The *samshu* brought by a shuffling coolie they opened and drank unwarmed, toasting their mutual enterprise. The bottle emptied, they set to work on their personal toilets.

Captain Boyd acted like a recharged battery, standing up straight and personable, carrying off his stained uniform as O'Connel did his slops and Menzies his frayed and dingy duck drill. Brownbill, as ever, was the neatest of the four. His pongee suit, beautifully darned, was of such good quality that it still held the lines of excellent tailoring. In silken cummerbund, with a tasteful puggaree about his solar topee, carrying his Wanghae bamboo cane, Brownbill still looked the dandy of the trading beaches, a little the worse for wear.

They blinked as they emerged from the bloom of the *godown* into the brilliant sunlight of the late afternoon, making for the Bund, marching along the Ocean Boulevard between and beneath the great banyans, with the leveling rays of sunset streaking through the root boughs over the level road; marching arm in arm. Sea vagabonds, battered in body and spirit by misfortune, smirched of soul with shame but marching abreast with a bit of a swagger like the adventurers they still were at heart.

To the right, the bay with the masts, rigging and funnels of a myriad craft, steamers, *sampans*, *junks*, *lorchas*, houseboats. To the right, perched on the hillside, the Celestial Riviera, the Monte Carlo of the Orient.

Tropic gardens, parks of brilliant bloom and shady walks, magnificent drives along the lower terraces, a row of palaces and flowers—flowers everywhere, their heavy perfume fighting and conquering all other odors.

Elsewhere over the three mile peninsula running seaward from the main island of Heung Shan, flung and packed in heterogeneous disorder, the dwellings of eighty thousand people—Chinese and Portuguese and all their variant degrees of inbreeding, including the true Macaoese, children of Portuguese fathers and Chinese mothers, quaint paradoxes with Oriental features and dress, with Portuguese names and preferred language, considering themselves the true aristocracy.

On the streets, coolies, merchants, peddlers, nuns, priests. Convent bells chiming over the tiled roofs of the faithful and the infidel. Macao, place of imperial possibilities, smirched by smuggling, gambling, opium. A million and a half dollars paid yearly in revenue to the Portuguese government by the largest opium factory in the world. The vices of heathenism pandered to and profited of by claimants of civilization.

THE house of Wong Fu Li, man of millions and of mystery concerning their source, once of the Chinese mainland, now finding it more convenient to live in foreign territory, a princeling of Macao, was set back in twelve acres that seemed to have been laboriously cleared and leveled from rocky reefs and planted with palms and feathery bamboos, drooping willows, with loquats, lychis and orange trees, with gorgeous masses of rare azaleas trained and trimmed and wired to resemble mandarins, in a setting of miniature lakes and lotus beds crossed by arched bridges.

Over grotesque grottos water trickled and the tinkle and splash of it was refreshingly plain to the panting quartet, gaining their breath at the top of a shallow flight of marble steps, after a succession of terraces, before they essayed the veranda of the house, screened in with fretted marble.

"Cost 'im a million, they say," said Brownbill. "Cost a 'undred thousand dollars to bring the rocks alone. Nothing but plain dirt to start with. Look at it now. ——, we must look like four bums!"

They all experienced the depreciating comparison between themselves and the quiet, fragrant, luxurious beauty of the place. The power of money and success weighted them down, oppressed their spirits with the ever-lurking knowledge of failure. That this magnificence should belong to a man of yellow skin, of supposedly inferior race, emphasized it, inured though they all were to the display of Oriental wealth. The sound of music came to them above the drip of the piped waters. Harmonic overtones from plucked strings, the flat *plup* of tympani marking the rhythm, a sudden gush of laughter and a breaking

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bubble of sing-song voices, all ceasing abruptly.

"Wong's wives," whispered Brownbill. "E's got as many as Solomon, they s'y. They've just twigged us from their balcony."

The place seemed imbued with watchfulness. Whispering was in order, their flushed faces, makeshift clothes and sweaty brows belonging to a lower order. They had seen no one since they entered the gardens though they were sure that, had their arrival not been expected and authorized, they would long since have been dismissed. The silence, the neglect of reception made them feel of the least importance. It might have been nicely calculated.

At the surmise O'Connell gained reaction, squaring his shoulders, lifting his shaven chin and setting the pace at a stride toward the veranda steps with the port of a heel-worn, split-scabbarded d'Artagnan. The others resumed their shreds of dominance and followed.

Two servants suddenly appeared at the head of the veranda steps, emerging from behind great dragon-bossed vases that held dwarfed, fantastic pines—worth a thousand *taels* apiece to the connoisseur. They bowed deferentially.

The marbel-screened veranda was penciled with the last shafts of the sunset, a myriad shafts of rose striking through the pattern, renewing its delicate traceries on the inner wall. The wide passage was alive with subdued twitterings, cooing and sleepy chatter of birds in cages of gilded bamboo; canaries, doves and parrots. A sunken pool held mottled goldfish of many, filmy tails. A faint suggestion of incense blended with flower fragrance from pots of blooming azaleas.

The steps of the quartet made a vulgar clatter as they followed the silent servitors over the marble flags and through heavy hangings to a narrower hall paneled in teak that was carved in open design for the upper half.

In the hall their going was muffled on a thick rug stretching the full length of the corridor, sole deep in silken nap. They were shown to a marble lavatory with fittings of silver, their attention called to a gong. They were left alone. The water that issued from the taps was perfumed, the towels of the finest linen. At every moment the contrast between themselves and their surroundings etched with bitter acid into their remnants of pride. They lost all disposition to speech as they perfunctorily cleansed themselves from the dust of the walk and gloomily surveyed their reflections in mirrors set in carved frames of ebony, reaching from floor to ceiling. They looked like beggars in an opera. Scaramouche and his fellows impudently invading the palace of an emperor.

"I'd give a leg for a drink," muttered Brownbill.

O'Connell took up the padded bamboo staff and softly smote the gong. Its vibrations were still swelling when a servant appeared, severe, dignified, richly dressed, leading the way, through smoothly sliding panels to a room where a board was set with a fidelity to Occidental methods that produced in them a vast relief. It was lavish of crystal, damask, silver and gold, with rare orchids twining from one to another of five places set with correspondent chairs. It was evident that they were expected to dine with Wong Fu Li and the prospect heartened them.

The furniture was of New World plan, of Oriental design and upholstery, wood and inlay. In each corner stood a servant, motionless, of unusual stature for Chinese, dressed in deep yellow; Wong's livery. The majordomo bowed them to a settee.

"The Most Honorable Wong Fu Li is detained," he said in clipped English that held no trace of "pidgin." "He begs you to excuse him and to be ente'tained in his absence."

Clapping his hands, stringed music, high-pitched, plaintive, commenced behind the open-carved partitions. The four servants, gliding like automata, returned from behind a screen with trays that held each a tall, thin glass of cordial that, as the guests swallowed it, affected smell and taste simultaneously, mellifluously, a sublimated *kümmel*. The manner of the waiters, serious, unaffected, offset any absurdity of individual service to these ocean hobos through whose veins the invigorating spirit stole like an ichor, restoring pride of race, lifting them to another plane.

The majordomo had left the room. When he returned, ushering obsequiously their host, the quartet had recovered poise. The courtliness of Wong Fu Li helped them to full ease. Advancing in his long, close-fitting vestment of rich purple, sparsely embroidered with small, oval ideographs of

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gold, he called each by name in sonorous, perfect English. He did not offer his hand, stroking a magnificent sleeve-specimen of a Pekingese spaniel, as he spoke. None of them had personal knowledge of Wong Fu Li. All of them had glimpsed him at some time in car or palanquin, or decorated *sampan*. None had realized the force of his standing presence.

He was as tall as O'Connell. He was erect as a bamboo. A great yellow diamond blazed on a finger of his right hand next to a signet of jade. On his left hand a priceless ruby broke out flashes of glorious rose. He was thin, but he emanated vigor. The lack of avoirdupois assisted in the hint of asceticism his face conveyed, contradicted when one analyzed the features and appraised the sensual lips, the arrogant eyes like black onyx set in chalcedony, the high-bridged nose. Eminently Oriental, not to be mistaken as a true Manchu yet bearing a curious resemblance to a far-removed race. Had Rameses the Second been brought to life and clothed in the purple robe, or were Wong Fu Li swathed in mummy clothes and set in a royal sarcophagus, one might have been puzzled to say which was Egyptian, which Chinese. High stubborn jaw, scant hair graying over prominent temples, head carried on the long neck, corded with coming age, all proclaimed the conscious pride of power.

During the meal Wong Fu Li chose to talk of many things, fondling his pet, feeding it titbits from the plates he barely touched—of the sea, the passing of sail to steam, the prophecy that the surface would soon become a watery desert under which passed the submarine caravans and over which aerial expresses would challenge sun-speed. He talked of sea-power, of new territories distributed by the mandates, of the methods of trade, of imports and exports, of synthetic inventions that had displaced such commodities as indigo, camphor and essential oils. In turn he gave his guests opportunities to display their own especial knowledge—or the lack of it—still and sparkling wines stimulating them, rich and savory foods emphasizing their sense of comfort and self valuation.

When they talked and he listened, the face of Wong Fu Li in repose seemed stripped of vitality, like a wonderfully devised and executed carving that held color but lacked life. He estimated his visitors through unwrinkled lids that closed down like hoods until nothing was seen of his eyes that was not shadowed, inscrutable.

The last course was of fruit and sweetmeats with fingerbowls of wafer-thin gold, repoussaged with writhing dragons. The rest of the meal's paraphernalia had been deftly removed, leaving the table bare save for the heavy covering, the lavender orchids, the richly hued fruits and candies, the plates of fragile porcelain, the golden fingerbowls and paring knives of the same precious metal. A nod from the majordomo and these also were taken up. One of the servants stubbed a sandaled toe in the edge of a rug, his tray tilted, a plate slithered across it, eluded his frantic grasp and struck the hardwood floor, edgewise between the rugs. It gave out a high musical note and smashed into fragments almost as fine as powder.

Wong Fu Li's eyes opened. His onyx orbs flashed like a hawk's, like a dark jewel that suddenly catches light. The man seemed to shrink and lose flesh so that his garments hung loosely while his face turned a greenish gray. He did not dare to look at his master even while he withered under his baleful stare that was a warrant of grim, implacable punishment. The four adventurers surveyed each other furtively. If they served this man——?

Pride of race, a stubborn pride, returned again with cigars and subtle liqueurs served in a brocaded saloon, the music now hushed, the servants all dismissed, the Pekingese borne off on a cushion by the majordomo. Now Wong Fu Li talked business.

"I have a wide web of trade," he told them. "Its strands are lines along which my ships travel—and also those of my rivals. The center of the web, so far as I am concerned, is here in Macao. Here I divide a part of my profits with the men who have helped acquire them.

"It is not an easy thing to eliminate the personal element from the commercial. My rivals are sometimes my enemies. They use the trade as a quiver for poisoned arrows with which they hope to destroy me. I fight them in kind. So.

"You gentlemen know the five seas of eastern commerce: China, Java, Banda, Celebes and Arafura. The Sunda Sea is but tributary. I do not trade east of Timor, west of Singapore, north of Canton or south of Flores. It is my desire to possess what

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I might term a flagship for my trading fleet, a steamer advantageously equipped that I can use as a mobile base from which to observe the machinations of my rivals and—perhaps—block them, disperse them, discredit them—demolish them."

His left hand lay palm up as he spoke, nervous and strong fingers slowly closing as he picked his final words. With the last verb the ruby flashed vindictively.

"You may trade, you may merely cruise, you may carry out other orders that may seem whimsical to you. Those will be *my* orders to be obeyed implicitly. The man who gives them will exhibit this jade signet as authority."

He showed them the ring, taking it from his finger for them better to observe the emblem, the intaglio head of a tiger.

"There are ports at which you may touch where it will be of advantage to me to have men of your race acting as heads of departments. At all times I shall expect you to cooperate to the ultimate performance of my commands. It is necessary for there to be on board a man of my own race, understanding fully my motives and desires, as it would be impossible for you to do. He will be given certain powers and act as *comprador*.

"For this I will pay you, Captain Boyd, a monthly sum equivalent to two hundred and fifty dollars gold. The same to Mr. Menzies. To Mr. O'Connell and Mr. Brownbill, two hundred dollars. There will be bonuses and a share of profits. You will have your own mess and steward. Your assistants will be competent but, outside of yourselves, all aboard will be Chinese, Macaoese or Malay."

He clapped his hands softly while the four debated the question with their eyes. The pay was fair, but they were to be only figureheads, it seemed. Wong Fu Li appeared to entertain no doubt as to their acceptance of his offer. He surveyed them lesiurely. Perhaps his glance rested a little longer on O'Connell, whose face had twitched wryly at mention of the *comprador*. The majordomo entered and laid down a leather bag that chinked softly. He emptied it and piled up ten-dollar gold-pieces in stacks of five and ten. Their eyes gravitated toward the little piles with the looks of well-starved dogs toward marrowed bones.

"If it please you, we will close the bargain." Wong Fu Li pushed the apportionment of advance wages to each and they pocketed it. "Your receipts are unnecessary. The *comprador*, Quong Yick, will call for you at the *godown* tomorrow morning and show you the steamer. You will go aboard and await orders. I shall see you again, some time tomorrow. After that it will not be—I hope—necessary.

"Tomorrow, gentlemen." He rose and bowed. "I trust you have passed a pleasant evening and one that will prove mutually profitable. Good-night."

He passed through the panels. The majordomo offered them cigars, slid aside an opening, escorted them to the veranda. A cool wind was blowing, a film of cloud obscured the stars. The night was very dark and, out of the blackness, came the heavy perfume of azaleas, the tinkle of falling water. Two servants with silk lanterns aswing from poles lighted their way down the terraces to the gate.

They were on the boulevard, walking beneath the banyans. Cars with shining eyes slid past them. Overhead electric arcs sputtered. They had touched luxury and it had vanished, like the palace of Aladdin. But the gold chinked bravely in their pockets.

"I'd like a charnce to loot the plyce," said Walker. "The old beggar's with 'is wives now."

The others grunted. There was faint chance of dispossessing Wong Fu Li of his riches, they fancied.

"We're fairly well fixed," Menzies volunteered.

"Fixed is the word," said O'Connell. "Too —— well fixed. I'd like more play to my beckets. 'Tis the *comprador* end of it that sticks in my craw. We've no authority. How about it, skipper?"

"I am an old man," Captain Boyd answered dryly. "I have had a magnificent meal following many, too many, indifferent and insufficient ones. In the matter of life I have little leeway, in the matter of positions small choice. I am not looking for pricks to kick against."

"Righto!" endorsed Brownbill. "Syme 'ere, skipper."

They walked on in silence, reluctantly finishing their excellent cigars, mentally and physically ruminant. At the door of the *godown* O'Connell refused to enter.

"I've a hunch," he declared. "I'm goin' to play *fan-tan*. If I double what I drew from Wong, I'll give him back his money

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tomorrow, personally or through his pet *comprador*—and get a receipt for it. The rest of you can do as ye like."

"Gold's been so scarce wi' me o' late, I'm fain to hold on to 't," said Menzies.

"Gambling has gone out of my blood," said Captain Boyd.

"I'm dead for sleep," said Brownbill.

"Then to —— with the three of ye!" said O'Connell amiably. "Scotch thrift, old age an' a yearnin' for *yen hok* may hold ye. I'm courtin' the lady who wears green cloth."

He went down the street humming—

Blow ye winds in the mornin'.

IT IS easy to find a *fan-tan* game to suit your purse and your degree in Macao. There are whole streets dedicated to Chance.

Two o'clock in the morning found O'Connell one of a feverish, staring crowd, about a long table, watching a heap of coins being tossed into the center of the board and covered by a cylinder while the bets were made. Wagers from fifty cents up to a thousand dollars were piled about the four sides of a marked square representing the beliefs of their backers that a division of the coins into fours would leave a residue of one, two, three, or four.

There were women in the crowd, painted dolls of Chinese with small fortunes in their hair ornaments, picturesque in their high-colored satins, attended by slave-girl maids. There were Chinese of every degree from petty clerks to millionaires and professional gamblers. While no faces showed either chagrin or joy at loss or win, all of them displayed intense excitement. The battery of shining eyes directed upon the imperturbable *croupier* as he plied his little separating stick appeared as if it must wither him with its fierce flame. But the house took a percentage of all bets and the *croupier* was as indifferent as Fate, whose representative he was.

The largest amount was being staked on three, the number backed by the foreign devil, O'Connell. His amounts were meager compared to some, but his nationality, combined with the fact that he was beginning to win every bet he placed, marked him to the fatalistic gamblers as one who had a run of luck and they ranged themselves with him in the race.

O'Connell had long since doubled his two hundred dollars of advance and with his victory he changed his goal, swept away with the intoxication of gambling. O'Connell was a born gamester. It was not so much the money as the deep-rooted instinct within him—fostered by the buffetings of experience—to conquer environment, to circumvent the chances, to be able to call himself master of the Fates. The money was only an element. He had never solved his problem. Luck had always been evasive at the last moment. But he had had moments of conquest, of intense elation.

Such things make the gambler—to conquer the chimera, to defy the odds that condemn one to mediocre limits of existence—barn-roosters believing they can become soaring eagles, if only the luck holds.

O'Connell was four thousand dollars—gold—ahead of the game. The way out of an unpleasant servitude lay just ahead, the view a trifle fogged by the yellow glare of gold. A few more bold casts and the *comprador* would be in the discard. That condition to his new position went hard against the grain of the man.

The *croupier*—a Macaoese—sing-songed the conclusion of the betting. O'Connell had risked everything including his original stake. Luck was with him; leaning over his shoulder. The *croupier* deftly separated the pile with a thin ebony switch. The clinking heap diminished, shrinking until the bettors began to forecast results. It dwindled to less than a dozen coins. Four swept away left—seven? No—six! Another division and two were left. Two had won and would pay. The foreign devil had lost after all, lost their money as well as his own.

Another uncounted pile was tossed onto the table and covered from sight. O'Connell rose from his place. Servants had been busy all night offering fruit, cigars and cigarets, beverages, free of charge to all comers. He tossed off a glass of some sweetish liqueur and went out.

He had been drinking intermittently all day, first the *samshu*, then Wong's vintages and a fearful mixture in the *fan-tan* rooms. Excitement had dominated intoxication but, with the sudden change to the cooler air outside, O'Connell's sight blurred and his locomotion became uncertain. The air was good and he lurched on down the ocean boulevard regardless of direction. Presently he came to Camoens' Grotto, a public park

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named after Portugal's luckless, exiled poet.

O'Connell had used the place for a sleeping chamber in the days of his greatest poverty before Quong Yick had invited him to the *godown*. Drowsy, he instinctively turned in to seek his rustic bench, screened behind a big banyan. It was not too cool for sleeping and he curled up with a sailor's cat-comfort of appreciation.

He awakened at dawn, his sailor's eyes sensitive to change of light, though it was still gray. Two men were talking in Cantonese the other side of the big tree. Their voices filtered clearly through the radial boughs. It was the end of their conversation and O'Connell gleaned only the last sentence, but that he caught perfectly. Watch-waking habits brought him awake and alert. The Cantonese dialect was plain to him and he fancied he recognized the tones of the speaker. There was a certain pomposity about them.

"So, brother of my wife, if you do not bring back this white pigeon, it would be well for you to secure a cord of yellow silk, for I warn you that he is very set upon this thing."

This tale of a white pigeon so valuable that a failing mission to secure it suggested strangulation, puzzled O'Connell. A yellow silk cord and a bowstring were equivalents. There was no mistaking that inference.

He moved cautiously and peered between the buttresses. The sunrise shone salmon on the faces of two men. One was a burly fellow of Malayan type—the plane of his features concave—the other was, as he suspected, the majordomo of Wong Fu Li. They moved and O'Connell ducked, listening to the crunch of their retreating footsteps on the gravel walk.

It was plain to him why these two had come to the little park. At such an hour it should have been the most secluded spot in all Macao, but for O'Connell's fogged brain. The Grotto lacked walls that might have ears, the open is a better place for confidence than any room.

Tramps as they are known in America are rarities in the Orient. That any man would preferentially elect to spend the night in the open when there are a hundred places in which to crawl never occurs to the oriental mind. No Chinese nor Macaoese would do it and, since they spoke in Cantonese, the majordomo and his wife's brother had deemed themselves especially discreet in choice of meeting place. Doubtless before O'Connell woke there were other matters they had talked about that had called for private and secret meeting. This final sentence—it piqued his understanding.

Without doubt Wong Fu Li was a bird fancier. O'Connell remembered the cages on the verandah. It was a common enough trait among wealthy Chinese. Without doubt he would pay high price for a special bird—even for a white fantail pigeon. And he was a despot. There was the incident of the broken plate. He wondered what had happened to the unlucky devil of a eunuch.

But this dish-faced messenger looked more fit for cutting throats than conveying pigeons, though he might be intelligent enough. O'Connell had long ago given up physiognomy as a gage for intelligence. Or the majordomo might have been orientally fanciful in his speech to his brother-in-law. The whole thing—pigeon and strangulation cord—might very well be symbolical. The pompous butler was just the sort to use such talk.

The dawn wind came up the hill and O'Connell's wakened senses protested. He shivered. His throat needed a drink, his stomach food. He had not even a copper cash in his pocket. He made his way back to the *godown*. Ching Kee was up and about, admitting him with smoldering insolence in his eyes and the pale ghost of a smile.

Boyd and Menzies were sound asleep. Brownbill snored and gagged in his bunk. O'Connell rolled in all-standing after draining the dregs from a *samshu* bottle. It was a far cry from the liqueurs of the night before, from the four thousand dollars he had won, and lost, with their fleeting vision of liberty—the States! That thought almost got a groan out of him, he had been so long an unwilling exile. Sleep sponged out all reckonings.

THE representative of Wong Fu Li called for them in mid-morning, introduced by Ching Kee, and O'Connell hardly concealed his amazement. For this *comprador*, this man close to Wong Fu Li's understanding, virtually their superior officer, was none other than the brother-in-law of the majordomo, the dish-faced, burly man who had talked of white pigeons and cords of strangulation in the dawn by the banyan.

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Quong Yick was his name. He had a suavity that was over-oiled, too unctuous for any sincerity. There were both conceit and deceit in his eyes, that moved too readily. That he was intelligent Wong Fu Li's choice certified, that he would stop short of nothing, that piracy and murder would be merely episodes in the performance of his everyday affairs, O'Connell felt more sure than ever upon closer acquaintance.

The man was powerfully built, of great breadth and depth of chest, bull neck, with columnar thrust of leg and arm against his thin, loose clothing that suggested thews of enormous power. He affected all four of them equally as a rascal and a bully endowed with a high degree of cunning. But they had not anticipated their new employ would be entirely a bed of roses, and they followed Quong Yick down to the obscure wharf where the steamer lay docked in a tangle of shipping, but handy enough to deep water.

She was the typical freighter, her lines obscured by the dock and the crowd of shore-boats and lighters about her water-gangways. Coolies swarmed antwise up and down her short ladders.

She was in sore need of paint, there were flakes of rust on her pitted bow plates, the capping of her big funnel was foul with soot, her derrick spars were grimy, her brasswork tarnished. Ventilator hoods swung at all angles, anchors and cable chains were thick with yellow oxides. O'Connell's expert eyes took in all these, with the slackness of guys and stays, the condition of the deck, the filth and rubbish along the bases of her deckhouses. The gangway that ran the length between fore and aft bridges sagged; stanchions were bent, bridge-screens torn, patched or lacking. Her boats were uneven in their falls, piled with odds and ends.

They stood looking at her with lengthening faces while Quong Yick surveyed them with a grin he took small pains to hide. This was what Wong Fu Li referred to when he spoke of "a flagship for my fleet, a vessel advantageously equipped, a mobile base." This outrage on seamanship!

"She's a mess," said O'Connell grimly.

The dish-faced *comprador* broke into his voluble pigeon English.

"Maybe wo'se, I think. Maybe heap wo'se. Not so —— bad. *Maskee.* Bimeby you see you come aboa'd."

Captain Boyd's face had been slowly turning from crimson to purple with repressed indignation. Suddenly he exploded into speech as he pointed at the tarnished letters on the bows, two of them missing.

"*The Lily of Chefoo!* Lily? ——! And she's worse than she looks. She's a hoodoo! Known from Tientsin to Timor as a jinx. Man, I had her once for seven months, eight years ago. A Dutch firm owned her then. Her compass correctors fizzled, we sheared a dozen rivets trying to make her head into a fifty-mile gale. She bucked till she broke her rudder-chains and, off Great Natoena, we stripped off her plating from bilge to bar keel on a reef that came up over night, according to the charts. Lost three men overboard. She's a stubborn, crazy, ill-found, unlucky jinx. As for her engines——!"

"Ye need tell me nothing aboot her engines," said Menzies gloomily. "Eight years syne when you had her? Six, wi' me, when the owners gave me charge of the junk they expected me to mak' steam wi'. Owner, rather, a rascal in Singapore named Castriotis, half Greek an' half Jew, wi' a heart as cheap an' hard as the coal he put i' the bunkers.

"Well I remember that coal. It wad ha' been fine for mendin' macadam roads. The engines! They stayed on their bed-plates by a meeracle. If ye tried for better than eight knots the engines 'ud rattle in her like solder in an empty can. She was babbited wi' type-metal. Her tubes wad mak' gude sprinklin' pipes for an overhead waterin' system. I ken a man who cam' oot o' the war wi' his leg bone broken in four places wi' shrapnel. Man, he had nothin' on the shaft of the *Lely!* Engines! Fulton made better ones. The verra date was worn off the manufacturer's plate. I wadna be surprized if he'd been ashamed an' left it off on purpose. She's naught but a heap o' junk!"

"Full of weevils, cockroaches and rats. She'll stink worse than an empty *soy* cask," contributed Brownbill. "If she's a flagship, I'm Hadmiral of the 'Igh Seas Fleet. It's orf with me. Wong can tyke back 'is lousy two 'undred. Not for Billy Brownbill! *Lily!* She'll smell like moldy *sauerkraut.* Let's 'and 'im back 'is jack and tell 'im wot we think of 'is —— flagship. Wot?"

"You three can go back an' I'm not blamin' ye," said O'Connell ruefully. "But I'm stayin'. I lost my advance screw at *fan tan* last night."

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The others glowered at him doubtfully.

"*Maskeel Maskeel* Topside look plenty bad. Can fix. You come looksee one time below. Maybe not so bad you think. You come looksee."

Quong's eyes suggested a somewhat humorous mystery. Doubtfully they trailed him aboard a forward gangway and walked along the crowded deck where cargo was being stowed. There was no sour stink from the open hatchways. A glance showed O'Connell that the stowage was orderly and fast. Aft, they descended the companion into a cabin that was spic and span with white paint and linen-slipped cushions, its fittings in perfect condition.

Quong grinned as he stole a glance at them and led on to a spotless galley and efficient-looking traderoom and supercargo's office. He showed them staterooms that would not have disgraced a liner; the captain's room made Boyd's eyes bulge as he tried to replace the untidy den of his former occupancy.

In the engine-room Menzies stared dazedly at the powerful, shining assembly of machinery, bright with polished gages and brasswork. Macaoese assistant-engineers were tending their charge with skilful pride. The engineer spoke respectfully, as one who sees a vision.

"Losh, d'ye ken what yon engines arre? Look at them! They've made a twin screw o' her. Triple expansion, mind ye. Triple expansion by Shields & MacAdams! There's eighteen knots, mebbe twenty, for the boat's lines are none so bad. Ye ken that, Boyd. But—they must ha' leefted the old junk bodily 'oot of her. Gutted 'er. An' the cost! A liner's engines in a freight packet!"

He stopped for a closer inspection and turned about, still excitedly.

"They're no new engines, though they're in fine condeetion. It's a mystery to me."

"Why spend a fortune on engines an' leave her lookin' like she is above?" queried O'Connell.

Quong Yick stood exhibiting a scoopful of coal brought from the bunkers by a Malay fireman.

"Number One coal," he said. "Evellything good below. Topside pidgin."

They turned on him demanding explanations that would confirm the vague ideas formulating in their own brains. He spread his hands deprecatingly, climbing the ladders nimbly as a baboon, leaving them to follow. In the cabin was Wong Fu Li. Quong Yick kowtowed humbly. O'Connell thought of the white pigeon.

"What do you think of her, gentlemen?" asked Wong Fu Li. "I suppose, Captain, you and Mr. Menzies are surprized at the changes. They are not generally known. I have taken considerable pains that they will not be. The engines came from the *Sessue Maru* that was wrecked off Barber's Point near Honolulu. I bought her from the underwriters. The *Lily* went out there and the engines were transferred at the Honolulu Iron Works. Her superstructure is untouched. Now that you gentlemen are to take charge, a little paint and general clearing up will not be amiss. It will be well perhaps not to overdo things. The point to be kept in mind is that the new *Lily* can do eighteen knots or better—when it is necessary. That will not occur in the general run of trade.

"I hear you had bad luck last night, Mr. O'Connell."

O'Connell flushed. Wong Fu Li was well posted.

"I call it just luck," he said. "Neither good nor bad."

Boyd had been stroking his beard and he spoke a little stiffly. Wong Fu Li had explained how the engines came to be changed —not why.

"I suppose Quong Yick or the man who shows your signet will inform us when we are to use our best speed?"

"Exactly. Quong Yick will not tell you how to run your ship, captain, but where. And the display of the signet carries my full authority. I do not mind telling you that it bears the emblem of a certain society that has many branches and of which I hold a certain office with certain privileges."

There was threat under this talk, O'Connell felt. He wondered why he had not thought before of the secret order of the *Ehr mu fuan*. He knew that their token was the snarling face of an animal known generally as "The Beast." He knew, as every man who has lived long in China knows, that the power of the *Ehr mu fuan* is far flung, reaching wherever Mongol or Manchu lives; from Tashkurghan, in Chinese Turkestan, to New York's Chinatown; that Malay and Arab traders were admitted to its outer circles and that nothing of any great consequence—be it Boxer Rebellion

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or the Revolution of Young China—could be carried on without the assent, or at least the tolerance, of the *Ehr mu fuan*. If Wong Fu Li bore the head of The Beast upon his gray jade signet, then Wong Fu Li was as high in council and authority of the order as he was above the grade of coolie.

It was probable that all aboard or about the steamer, down to the lowest paid stevedores' waterboy, were a part of its ramifications. This was hinted at in Wong's statement of the considerable pains he had taken that the changes on the *Lily of Chefoo* should not become general knowledge. But why—why endow a trading vessel with such an equipment only to be used on occasions?

To O'Connell the answers all pointed toward contraband or piracy. Having before contemplated those endeavors as a probable condition of his new job, he shrugged his shoulders, relieved that he would be allowed to clean up the superstructure and spend some money on paint. On duty, O'Connell performed it thoroughly.

He glanced at Menzies. The engineer was plainly infatuated with his new charge. It was long since he had handled such engines. Brownbill seemed smug enough. The captain alone was a bit stiff—feeling his too-limited authority. There was just enough mystery and promise of adventure back of the whole affair to bring to O'Connell that backwash of energy and anticipation that too often ebbs with the forties, a revival of his gambling lust. Such thrills were about all he lived for now; sex attraction and desire had died down to banked fires to be stirred only by such women as he seldom saw.

It might be admitted that Captain Boyd was a better captain, despite his age, than any available Chinese skipper—for all they claimed to have invented the compass, O'Connell told himself, scornfully—and that Menzies was a superbly competent engineer, when sober, went without saying. Brownbill was a first-rate supercargo so far as cargo handling went and, if their trading experience was to take in the lesser plantations and beach stations where white men—principally Dutch—presided, Brownbill might well do better than Quong Yick. Why O'Connell was chosen as first-mate he was not so sure. He had not met his assistants to judge of their qualifications. O'Connell was a good first-mate—when the liquor madness was off him—but he did not see that he was necessary to Wong Fu Li—unless it was as a fighting man.

He was sure of this, that they four were to cover Wong Fu Li's real purposes, even as the old shell of the *Lily of Chefoo* covered up her splendid engines. She could potter along, despised by the craft of rivals with a capacity of ten knots—the average minimum—but, when occasion came, she could slip the leash and become an ocean greyhound, as the Ford body of some wily traffic-regulator might mask eight cylinders.

But there would be little police duty about the *Lily*, O'Connell fancied. Just the opposite. And to such prospects O'Connell thrilled. He was the type of Irishman who may let his reason control all emotions but one—the reaction to fight. He gloried in it and he bore the scars of both honorable and dishonorable conflict, sea-scallywag that he was.

Wong Fu Li was not chancing so much as might be imagined on the hazard of Boyd's and Menzies' constant tippling, the opium habit of Brownhill and the tilts with John Barleycorn that O'Connell conducted at irregular periods. Such vices were emphasized ashore. At sea, the delight in good engines, the smell of oil and hot metal meant more to Menzies than alcohol, the captain's appetite diminished with the tang of sea and wind, the sight of open ocean. So with O'Connell, plus the savage delight of keeping a superstructure absolutely clean, all rigging prime and taut. Brownbill's *yen hok* would have to come through Quong Yick and the *comprador* would undoubtedly either control the supply or cunningly dilute it.

WONG FU LI left in a gorgeous palanquin borne by his own servants in their livery of deep yellow. They were waiting for him on deck at the head of the main companionway. The soles of his immaculate shoes were not soiled by deck or dock dirt and the white men noticed that the coolies had either withdrawn to the wharf or the hatchways. Wong was a personage about whom it did not pay to be curious. He did not wish it and his wishes were backed by an authority none wanted to challenge.

There is as much curiosity in a Chinese crowd as in one on Sixth Avenue, but the Chinaman has his tabus. Not an eye was

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turned in the direction of Wong Fu Li seating himself on the floor of his padded palanquin while Quong Yick almost groveled respectful *adieux*. The four bearers swung up the poles to their shoulders with the exquisite precision of long habit and trained muscles, a blind was drawn and Wong Fu Li was on his way, the palanquin never varying an inch from the horizontal, down ladder or along the level, carried as if its weight were no more than a sack of feathers.

Quong Yick shook his obsequious pose away with a shrug of his shoulders, turning toward the four officers of the *Lily of Chefoo* with the tolerant air of one who treats those as equals he knows to be his inferiors. The inference was plain. It was to be a constant irritation to the quartet from now on. O'Connell's hunch about the *comprador* was a correct one.

When a man straightens up from going crooked it is apt to be at an acute angle. So with Captain Boyd, who took on superrectitude with his new office. The fact that Quong Yick was to advise him where and when to go, affected him like a nasty boil on the back of the neck, that must be endured, that will not be cured until it comes to a head. From the moment Wong Fu Li left the deck, hatred was born between Boyd and Quong Yick in a glance. O'Connell noted it and deprecated it. He could be a good hater himself, but this was their meal-ticket and the only one in sight. If the butter on the bread was bitter it must be swallowed.

The first clash came almost immediately. With money in their pockets, with no real equipment for their position, the question of clothes was paramount. To Boyd, uniform and the office were inseparable, a visible part of his regained authority. Menzies cared less but he had to have an engine-room outfit. Brownbill, inborn dandy that he was, had found an additional sting to poverty in the lack of fine raiment.

They had but one brush and a broken comb between them. One razor, no niceties of toilet, no underclothes, tobacco, anything! Their hair was long, their shoes were almost a disgrace. O'Connell, broke, was more modest than the rest. He borrowed fifty dollars from Boyd, twenty-five from Brownbill, knowing by instinct that he might as well ask Menzies for half a pint of his blood as the loan of a string of copper cash.

As the four started to go ashore Quong Yick met them at the head of the gangway. "You come back pletty soon?" he asked, and it was more of a command than a question.

"You go to the ——!" returned Boyd. "I am captain of this ship."

"I think maybe you like tell *comprador* when you come back," Quong persisted. "This ship got all coal, all ca'go along time sun go down. Tide come along topside seven o'clo'. Me, I speak along tug he come along same time. I speak befo' you come long time. Yestiddy I speak along tug."

It was a concession, the hint of previous ordering. It gave a thin coating of sugar to the fact that Quong was telling them to be aboard by seven. Boyd flushed. Brownbill looked Quong up and down as if he had a mind to tell him in Billingsgate just what he thought of him, then chuckled and spat deftly between rail and stringpiece. Menzies merely looked dour and O'Connell grinned.

"Tug at seven, eh? Good man, Quong. I'll be back in time to take her over."

Boyd, with an old man's pride, walked stiffly up-town, unspeaking, knowing that he must endure Quong, knowing he had made a mistake in arousing enmity, unwilling to admit the false lead even to himself. But he returned mollified with the other three at six, preceded by coolies carrying their duffel, barber-trimmed and clipped and shaven, fresh in uniforms turned out with the cut and speed of Oriental tailoring, well shod, officially capped, the inner man nourished and treated to more than one "gangway cup."

O'Connell took smart charge of the deck. His Chinese second was efficient. Menzies' assistants had steam for him and the engines working like a watch. Quong Yick was discreetly invisible. Boyd, with old-time magnificence, left the towing out of his ship to his mate. In the dusk they worked out into the West River, clear of the jumble of shore craft and headed for the China Sea. Boyd came on deck and gave the course to O'Connell—

"Singapore is our port, Mr. O'Connell," he said.

Presently O'Connell repeated the course to the Chinese second-mate, relieving him, and went below. Menzies had come up from the engine-room well pleased. Boyd and Brownbill were in the main cabin. Quong elsewhere.

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There was good Scotch on the table. *Tansan* water, cigars, a jar of tobacco. The *Lily of Chefoo* glided along at ten knots, with leisurely restraint of strength, on even keel. Boyd formally toasted them to the success of the voyage. The scene was well staged, convincing to any outsider. The cabin of a successful freighter under a Chinese flag but manned with white efficiency.

Yet a shade sat with them, grinning, mocking their sham authority. And there were other details that questioned the status of the craft as a peaceful trader. All steamship companies, native and foreign, plying about Canton, have guards who carry rifles against pirates. But the cabin of the *Lily* had become a veritable arsenal while her chief officers were ashore. There were two racks of rifles and one of old-time cutlases with brass hilts. There was one rack of revolvers.

Each of the four had found automatic and holster hanging in his room, with boxes of ammunition. Quong made no secret of the steamer's capacity for offense or defense and evidently counted on them as natural leaders of such occasions, should they arise. None of them made any comment but loaded and carried his weapons with him.

FOR weeks the *Lily of Chefoo* sailed over calm and stormy sea, unloading here, taking cargo there, coaling and taking on supplies. Singapore, across the shallow, treacherous waters of the Java Sea to Batavia, to Samarang and Surabaya. Across the Flores to Macassar, up the Macassar Strait to Menada at the head of Celebes' northeastern tentacle, through the spicy Moluccas, touching Sua, Bura and Ceram, south to Timor, east to Timor Laut, scouting through the peacock-colored seas with their swiftly varying depths and swinging currents, dodging through the Straits, back to Macassar, off once at top speed as soon as night fell to Singapore and top speed back again to Surabaya.

As a trading trip it was patent that the *Lily of Chefoo* was not making profits enough to pay for fuel and wages. Cloves, nutmegs, cacao, *gemuti* rope-fiber, copra, sandalwood, seed pearls, black pearl-shell, a little gold-dust, birdskins of bright plumage, gathered here and there in small lots.

It became plain to O'Connell, or he thought it became plain, that the *comprador* of the *Lily of Chefoo* made excuses to confer with Malay and Arab traders. The Dutch agents he left entirely to Brownbill. They began more and more to anchor off unimportant landings and little visited islets. Sometimes Brownbill would go ashore and brush up the meager crums of trade and always Quong Yick would talk apart with trader or headman. Sometimes the *comprador* went off alone in a native *proa* that came out to the steamer, and return with the announcement that there was no trade. Occasionally O'Connell went ashore and sometimes he overheard and understood through his Chinese or his pick-up vocabulary of Malay and Arab. Occasionally they talked Tagalog. Always he listened and learned this much—that they were waiting for some steamer of a rival trader to make some special but as yet uncertain port upon some special occasion.

O'Connell guessed that this steamer would by then have collected some rich cargo—perhaps of pearls or gold-dust or jade—which the *Lily of Chefoo* would loot, transfer or confiscate, with or without excuse, by right of her extra speed and armament.

It was clear that Quong Yick talked with all these men as a member of the *Ehr mu juan*. There were quick passes, a jabber of

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whispered words. The trader or headman, Malay, Javanese, Jagalog, Chinese, Macassan, Menadan; invariably recognized in him some superior to themselves. But O'Connell fancied that Quong began to look a little strained. He pondered whether Quong was not overdoing his questioning, whether the *Ehr mu fuan*, with its comprehensive membership, might not be merely a universal sort of information bureau open to any member of rank equal with Quong, open to the rival traders, for example. The faintest lines of worry commenced to show in Quong's concave face and O'Connell wondered whether, as the mysterious "white pigeon" eluded them, a vision of a yellow silk strangling cord did not become clearer.

Listen as he might and where he might, O'Connell never heard mention of a white pigeon. If this was a metaphor of Quong's brother-in-law, the majordomo, no one else employed it when they spoke in hearing of the Irishman. And he was quite sure from things let fall that they did not suspect his eavesdropping.

He heard uncomplimentary things about the four of them. He saw himself in Chinese eyes and the vision was not flattering. Boyd, busy with difficult navigation, took them successfully through the seas where the bottom was one moment a level plain less than six fathoms beneath their keel for league after league, then a maze of coral through which they zigzagged their course by narrow passage, next gulfs greater than the Grand Cañon or a succession of terraces mounting to one danger peak. Everywhere perilous currents, shifting bars and channels.

Menzies knew little beyond his engines. But both he and Boyd were beginning to drink heavily off duty. There was plenty of liquor in the lockers. Wong Fu Li might have calculated nicely the balance between their efficient services and the alcoholic dulness of their leisure, a balance that could always be adjusted by Quong Yick, who, as *comprador*, held the keys to all supplies. Brownbill, with insufficient responsibilities, had his nightly opium pipes, lying in pleasant comas.

But O'Connell kept his wits clear. His vices had been three; women, gambling and liquor. All alike were matters of appetite, aside from reason. He did not care to mix with the Chinese aboard where he was an officer. That was a different matter to patronizing their games of chance ashore. Women were out of the question. And he had fashioned a game even more fascinating than drinking, a game that piqued his wits, appealed to a natural love at solving puzzles, a Celtic belief in his own craft as against that of a Chinaman.

The game was to match himself against Quong Yick's secrecy and, through Quong, against Wong Fu Li. Not that he intended to block Wong's purposes.

It was not what he was paid for and what he had tacitly agreed to do—to help Wong gather white pigeons or whatever else he fancied without recourse to scruples. That the white pigeon and perhaps the mandatory signet ring would ultimately appear, he held no doubt and, meantime, it gave him diversion to try and anticipate the moves of the game. It served to offset the fact that all four of them were no more in control of the *Lily* than is a shadow in control of the man who casts it.

The steamer was in Macassar for the third time since they had left Macao. Lighters were alongside from which they were coaling, ant-like files of Macassans carrying baskets of fuel and Menzies cursing the quality of the coal with steadily increasing vigor and vituperative ability. Quong Yick left before *tiffin* on some mysterious errand that took him beyond the harbor limits in a sailing proa that appeared alongside two hours after the *Lily* dropped her hook and signaled for *pratique*.

In mid-afternoon O'Connell, grimy and hot in his smudged dungarees, pacing the after bridge, saw the proa scooting back, recognizing it by the patch on its big lateen sail. There was a stiff breeze and the outrigger, despite two natives seated on the crossbars, fairly lifted as the gale flung itself into the sail. It came on, seething over the emerald water, shot up into the eye of the squall, the big sail coming down like the swift folding of a seabird's wing and the flat leeward hull grazing the side of a lighter. Quong Yick sprang over the coal and barked for "gangway" at the natives on the narrow loading ladder, running nimbly up the cleats as they cleared the way.

There are travelers who affect that the Chinese face is ever a blank, but excitement fairly shone out of the *comprador's* features as he dived below. Menzies followed him to the main cabin and O'Connell joined them. Brownbill was already there, Boyd coming

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from his cabin, yawning and slipping on his linen uniform jacket.

"We go out *now*, chop-chop, plenty quick!" Quong said authoritatively.

"The bunkers are only half full," objected Menzies. "We can't go till we're coaled."

Quong waved the protest aside.

"We go now. Maybe too late now. But we go."

There was agitation back of his insistency. Captain Boyd was sluggish with sleep and the whisky he had taken before turning in. The liquor had furnished him with a mock dignity, a slow pomposity and insistence of recognition that was a shadow of his early days.

"I am in command, Quong Yick," he said. "It was especially specified that while you might tell me where to go, I was to run the ship without interference. I am not accustomed to receiving orders."

Quong Yick looked at him as an exasperated nurse regards a troublesome child that she has no present time to spank into submission.

"Some people they steal pearl belong along Wong Fu Li," he explained. "Long time we try find out. This time we catch, maybe, suppose we go plenty —— quick. Suppose we no catch——?"

He spread out hands that spoke a volume, that laid the blame on them, that suggested punishment. That the glib yarn was probably a lie O'Connell did not doubt. If Wong Fu Li was so painstaking on the trail was it likely that he would permit the diving and drying-out of the oysters to go on without interference? Yet he might. To let the others plow and sow, harrow and weed and reap and then to annex the winnowed grain, that might well be Wong's way.

"You goin' to take the pearls away from them?" he asked. "When you catch 'em?"

Quong Yick's eyes were glinting like jet spangles.

"Can do. We find—then we take. Suppose they no give, we got plenty gun."

He watched them narrowly, as if he had made a test.

"I'll no leave port wi'out my bunkers fu'," said Menzies. "So there's an end to 't."

"Guns!" exclaimed Boyd with semi-tipsy gravity. "What's this talk of guns? You are talking piracy, Quong Yick."

The *comprador* seemed to be holding himself in. His flashing eyes, slitted to quarter-inch curves of glittering obsidian, met the blue-gray eyes of O'Connell, holding amusement and expectation. As if flint had struck steel Quong Yick showed fire.

"*Yah!*" he exclaimed and the syllable was eloquent of contempt. "You no wantee go? Suppose you looksee along of this."

With eye-baffling legerdemain he produced a ring, slid it to a finger of the hand he thrust beneath their eyes. The soft gold held a circle of gray slab, intaglio'd deeply with the face of a snarling tiger. It was the symbol of the *Ehr mu fuan*. For a second he displayed it and, to the mind of each of the white men it conjured up the same vision—the graying face and shrinking form of the servitor who had dropped the plate in the palace of Wong Fu Li.

"Now—we go. Chop-chop!" Quong spoke with assured arrogance.

The ring vanished. The mandate had been delivered. The *comprador* went into his own cabin next the fore-and-aft gangway. Brownbill swore just over his breath. O'Connell's eyes twinkled as he let Boyd go on deck first, his lips compressed. Menzie's face was more dour than ever. It reminded O'Connell of reluctant animals in a circus, rebelling against the tricks, unmindful of the regular food and care.

Quong Yick had cracked the whip, fired the pistol. There was nothing for them to do but obey, to jump through the hoops, roll over and play dead at command. They had not been trapped or even cajoled. Stern necessity had made them accept the situations offered and it was their own fault if they had become puffed up with false pride of uncertain office.

Boyd gave his orders surlily and O'Connell saw them carried out. Menzies vanished. The lighters drew off. The *Lily of Chefoo* got up steam under forced draught and bucked her way out of the harborage at sunset against the flood. But for her good engines she could barely have managed it, but with them forcing the churning screws she sliced through all opposition and forced her way along the course set by Quong.

Several times O'Connell was tempted to ask the *comprador* if it was pigeons or pearls they were after, but he maintained his reservations. It was in his head that Quong had not wanted to produce the ring, that he would have preferred to gain his own way through his personal authority.

O'Connell did not want Quong to question how he had learned anything about a white

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pigeon. The holding of the secret heightened the thrill mounting in O'Connell's veins. Like the biblical warhorse, O'Connell sniffed the battle from afar off. The climax of the trip was coming, the use for the speed, the rifles.

"The white pigeon is no dove of peace, I'm bettin'," he told himself in his own cubicle.

As he shaved clean and close he hummed between the razor strokes.

"O, a ship she was rigged and ready for sea;
And all of her sailors were fishes to be!
Windy-y weather!
Stormy-y weather!
When the wind blows, we'll all be together."

ALL through the night the *Lily of Chefoo* disproved her ancient hoodoo. Under the drive of the three-expansions she flung herself through a welter of phosphorescent seas, and morning found her lunging on with the blue smudge of the Sunda Islands far to starboard, reeling off revolutions that might have made a liner's commander envious. The Malay, Chinese and Macaoese force under the sour gaze of Menzies, stoked and wiped and oiled and watched the bearings while the engines worked like chained twin genii, thrust upon thrust of terrific power, with certain hissing intakes, snorts of protest and gnashings, but with unfailing regularity.

At noon the next day the register showed three hundred and three miles put behind them in seventeen hours. Menzies, grim of face, came in to tiffin from a four-hour nap and conned the figures as he poured himself a stiff drink.

"A wee better than eighteen knots. Nane so bad, considerin' we were fightin' wind an' tide. We'll do better noo, I'm thinkin'. I'll no' deny but that they're a sweet bit o' machinery, those engines."

Wind and tide had not been the only adversaries of the *Lily of Chefoo.* There had been a medley of mad currents—born of varying bottoms and sub-sea formations—that forced the sea into maddening and sudden compression and passionate spoutings that tugged or pushed at the steamer and sought continuously to wreck her.

It was manifest that the Scotchman thought of little beyond the performance of his engines and, since he found matter for pride in them, would do his utmost to expedite matters. Of the quest, the adventure, unlike O'Connell, Menzies cared nothing. Navigation took all of Boyd's energies and skill. The charts were none too accurate, bottoms were always changing, reefs thrust up by submarine volcanic action, banks washed up overnight.

Boyd had been on the bridge all night and the resources of his still keen brain had to be partly used to whip up the forces of his aging body. He had found O'Connell a good navigator, not merely from a mechanical standpoint but possessing the sailors' sense so imperatively necessary for those traveling indifferently charted seas. Yet Boyd held to his own responsibility. It was his intimate knowledge of the shoals of Sunda that had enabled them to maintain full speed through the night. By day the varying color of the water was a generous guide. Now Boyd was exhausted.

Through the afternoon the steamer's hull vibrated to the lunge and recoil of the powerful engines until nothing could lie for a moment on table or transom. It seemed as if the rivets must inevitably be shaken out of her. The dense smoke plumed from her funnel without attempt at concealment of her speed. There were few to see in those waters. And the chase was on.

It would have to be a rich cargo, O'Connell thought, to offset the expense of all this dodging. Even piracy needed auditing. Doubtless Wong Fu Li knew his business. He wondered what his share would be of the plunder. Whether there would be much of a fight. Chinese piratical methods were crude. Teach was a gentleman compared with the run of Oriental buccaneers.

O'Connell looked at the log. Nineteen knots.

The most easterly of the Sunda Isles is Wetter. They made the island toward the last of the sunset, a blur of land against banked vapors of dull purple and crimson. Against the loom a star showed and blinked. A quartermaster burned green and red Costons in reply to this signal. Quong politely asked O'Connell to slow down. Out of the night there came a small *proa*, dancing on the ground swell, hardly visible save for flashes of seafire levining out from her run. There was a swift chatter of Javanese, unintelligible to O'Connell, except for placing the dialect. Then Quong, a little of the anxiety gone from his eyes, asked for full speed again and a new course to Buru, in the Moluccas.

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North, due north they steamed, with two thousand fathoms of free water under them. Boyd took the bridge at midnight and O'Connell relieved him at four. Dawn, rushing up, showed the savage tangle of Buru, a second *proa* patrolling Pitt Passage, a flag rising to its lateen peak. There was another slowing down, another interchange of savage syllables. Quong's face, glowing in the sunrise, showed a fierce triumph.

"She go along Manipa Strait ten hour ago," he said. He and O'Connell looked at each other in mutual love of the chase, motives aside, their purpose blent. The mate led to the chart room and spread the maps. Manipa Strait lay between Buru and Ceram. He tapped the spot and Quong, with his long finger-nail, traced the probable course of their quarry.

"She go no'th. She go along Bo'neo by No'th Cape. She go by Balabac, south Balabac into China Sea. She go Hongkong, suppose we no stop along that steamer. We must stop befo' she come along here."

"Here" marked the islands of the Jolo Archipelago. American Territory, within the treaty boundary and no place for piracy. O'Connell considered the track of the vessel they sought—straight north from Manipa Strait between Obi and Sula groups, then west past the northeastern tip of Celebes through Banka Pass.

He might shortcut between Sula and the Pelings, but it was tricky going. The only available chart was confessedly hazy as to details. Annotated as unreliable. The chase had to be intercepted as soon as possible. Quong gave twelve knots as her best. O'Connell picked up his dividers, calculated, then pricked a spot on the chart.

"We'll figure she does her best," he said. "And we ours. If we stick to blue water and this weather holds, Menzies should crack up to twenty, if the —— boat don't shimmy itself apart. Call it twelve of theirs to twenty of ours. We'll trail them—call it three hundred miles—and we'll overhaul her here or hereabouts at ten tonight. Call it midnight."

Quong looked at the prick on the equator line, off Bolango, Celebes.

"Good."

"She'll have lights?"

"Mebbe she sabby we come along. Mebbe not. But she no sabby we come so quick. She think we some place down along Banda way."

"Then we should pick her up easily enough if the weather stays clear. We'll carry no lights ourselves. Will they come through with the goods with or without a fight, Quong?"

Quong looked at him quizzically.

"You like to fight?"

"I don't mind earning my divvy, Quong."

Quong grinned.

"I sabby you Ilishman. I sabby maybe you fight all same ——."

That Quong did not imagine the handing over of the loot would be a matter too tame was soon evidenced by the overhauling of weapons and the unboxing of two rapid-fire guns that were conveyed to bows and stern. The white men made no comment. They were committed. From now on they were Wong's men, neither better nor worse than the rest of the rascals hired to do his bidding, twentieth-century freebooters.

THE barometer kept steady all day. The sky remained clear. The sun went down without a cloud. With the sunset a wind began to blow, filling the vault between the dark, phosphor-crested seas and the starry sky with tremendous impulse, blowing from the south and slowly piling up the sea. At nine-thirty, as if at a signal, the wind died out.

Trembling beneath its plume of smoke, shot by fire now and then, the *Lily of Chefoo* plunged through the waves due west from Batian Isle toward Bolango, plowing up a swathe of glowing yeast and churning up a wide wake of pale blue liquid fire. The globules of spray that fell and rolled on the deck were the color of burning alcohol.

O'Connell, at ten o'clock, was on the bridge. Boyd had turned in, to be called when the chase was sighted. Brownbill had foregone his opium and was on the bridge with O'Connell, night-glasses continually at his eyes.

It was Quong who first sighted the chase. He pointed her out to O'Connell. Her lights were the tiniest of specks, rising and falling on the seas that were rapidly losing formation in the calm, but running in the long roll of the ground swell. There was the high loom of the northeastern arm of Celebes back of her, the high ridges indicated by a dull glare from volcanic fires—possibly on Mount Supitan, O'Connell thought.

Eleven bells struck. He gave an order to rouse Captain Boyd. As soon as the skipper

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appeared O'Connell and Brownbill went below to strap on their automatics and belts with extra clips. They also preempted a rifle apiece and filled their pockets with shells.

"Take a gun up to the skipper, will you, Brownie? I'm going down to see Menzies. I imagine he's on duty."

O'Connell carried a pistol for the engineer. He found him by his engines, exhorting the assistants, oilers, firemen, to top effort. His breath reeked of whisky.

"I'm no drunk," he told O'Connell thickly. "But I'm main tired an' I need the kick. Gi' me the gun, though I'll no be needin' it unless some of this rabble slows up. I'll stay wi' the engines, unless you're needin' me on deck."

"If we do I'll give you word. There'll be a bit of a scrap, I fancy."

"I'm no' a killin' mon, O'Connell. I'm no coward, mind ye. If I must fight, I wull, but I dinna want to start shootin' in cold bluid. It's all a matter o' releegion, ye ken. Yon Chinese ha' no fear o' hell. When a man's deid he's deid, wi' them. I'm no' so sure o' that. They're no' worryin' aboot havin' to account fo' him at a Judgment Seat. I'm no' so sure o' that either. It's no' so much ma conscience, ye ken, as a regard fo' the hereafter."

O'Connelll noticed the stare in Menzies' eyes. The whisky and the heat of the engine-room atop of the long stress of his superintendence were telling on him. Professionally he functioned perfectly. On other things he was inclined to be maudlin.

The skipper too had been strengthening his bodily resources with a fillip or so of liquor. There was a bottle of Scotch in the chart-room and it was rapidly vanishing between Boyd and Brownbill. O'Connell was surcharged with exhilaration that needed no outside spur. He joined Quong, focusing glasses on the chase. The hull was plain now, the lights in her ports bright, the smudge of smoke from her funnel manifest in the field of the binoculars. They were both off the mouth of the Gulf of Tomini, steering northwest.

The *Lily of Chefoo*, lightless, closed the gap like wolf coursing after hare. O'Connell did not know the name of the quarry or of her owners. That was not necessary, any more than that he should believe the tale of Quong concerning the rights of the overhaul. It might be true. There was no reason for Quong to make excuse. Probably such methods had long been a source of Wong Fu Li's wealth. It may have accounted for the fact that he was no longer *persona grata* to the Chinese Government and found it policy to live in Macao, high official of the *Ehr mu fuan* though he might be.

Piracy was a live trade in China, live as the holdup banditti and warehouse-robbers of America. The greatest of modern Chinese generals had frankly been a bandit compromising with the government, accepting office that gave easier graft, even daring to appropriate the Chinese air service to his own personal devices and remove the planes from Peking to where he reigned supreme. Now Wong Fu Li had equipped himself with a fast steamer for overhaul or escape as the case might be. Complaints might be dealt with by a liberal amount of squeeze to Portuguese officials in Macao. It was a world of graft, O'Connell philosophized, and he was out to get his bit of it while he had his chance.

Suddenly a flare showed beneath the smudge. Quong chuckled.

"She *sabe*," he said. "She no *sabe* how fast we go."

It seemed plain that the chase had sighted the bulk of the *Lily* under the starlight and that they on board suspected the purpose of her presence and were stoking hard for extra steam and speed. But the faster boat drew up relentlessly and at midnight they had cut across her bows, swinging about her in a circle mocking the attempt at escape.

Quong openly took command at will. Wong Fu Li's signet was on his finger. Boyd, set aside, frowned and took more whisky. The *Lily* closed in, steamed parallel. The beam of her searchlight bridged the narrow lane of water between the two ships, sweeping from bows to funnel, from funnel past bridge and a larger deckhouse than the *Lily's*, the glare of the ray flashing back from portholes; on to the stern and back again, raking her pitilessly. Above the rail, on the bridge, figures showed vividly, craning forward with pallid faces, then swallowed up again in the darkness. The searchlight of the chase was illumined, swung toward the *Lily*. For a moment the two beams entangled then passed on their revealing ways.

At twelve knots the two steamers slid through the silent seas together, twelve to fifteen miles from shore, O'Connell placed

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it. Quong shouted through a megaphone in Portuguese:

"Send all your men below except those on the bridge. Tell them to make no resistance and it will be better for them. You know what we come for and who we are, Thieves of the Sea!"

The searchlight spotted the skipper of the chase, a black-bearded Portuguese who bellowed back a string of foul language, in a voice that disdained a sounding horn. He ended with an order and the deck of his boat gleamed with sudden flashes. More came from the bridge. The drone of bullets was in the air. Some *whupped* into resistance of wood or whined as they sharply richochetted from steel. One crashed through the chart-room window.

"Spunky. Wot?"

O'Connell, chuckling at the Portuguese skipper's facility of language, the pot blackening the kettle, turned to see Brownbill sighting his rifle. The *Lily's* beam stayed fixed on the bridge of the chase where the captain still leaned above the canvas screens, shaking his fists—both of them—one gripping a pistol. Quong leaped deckwards like a great cat, his face lit up with an infernal delight.

Before Brownbill could pull his trigger there came from below the crackle and sputter of a machine gun, spraying the bridge with deadly aim. The hail of bullets tore away the canvas screens and left the Portuguese skipper lying prone, head and shoulders off the bridge. As O'Connell looked, the roll of the steamer sent him lunging off to the main deck. There were other prostrate bodies back of his.

A rattling volley from rifles now sounded the full length of the *Lily*, concentrating where the crews stood by their boats on the port side and from bows and stern the two machine guns spouted death. The deck of the *Lily* was above that of the other vessel. The planks of the latter looked like a shambles.

Men threw themselves flat behind the rail, dived down companionways, rolled on the deck in their last agonies. High shrieks sounded in Oriental protest. The answering fire withered, died out. The two boats swung along at matched gait, all guns silent. A Chinese clambered to the top of the deckhouse and shouted for quarter.

Below him a port was opened and the flash of a rifle showed. A bullet slapped through the canvas screen and bored the peak of O'Connell's cap, angling upward. The *Lily's* search-ray shifted to the deckhouse. Quong shouted back. There was a wordy duel. A second bullet sped from the open port and hummed close to O'Connell's ear. With an oath he caught up his rifle and fired. He was not sure how well he had aimed. Beside him Brownbill targeted the port. Quong came leaping to the bridge, throwing aside the barrels of their guns.

"No, no!" he cried. "No can do! You come down now, we go along in boat. Me speak white man along that deckhouse. You speak along that white man, O'Connell. You tell him we no want kill him, suppose he no shoot."

"The —— I will! I don't care if he's white or black, he came —— near getting me."

"*Maskee!* I say you come!" Quong shoved the signet into O'Connell's face. "White man and white woman. No want hu't them, suppose they stop along shoot."

He was tugging at them to come down on deck. Another bullet, singing through the group, emphasized the fact that the white man needed stopping as a marksman, one way or another. Quong's anxiety to spare his life and get him safely off the boat puzzled O'Connell until the *comprador* mentioned the white woman. Instantly the truth flashed over him, the reason for the long delay, the pains spent to overhaul this especial steamer on this especial trip. For the moment he was on the rustic bench behind the banyan in Camoens' Grotto.

Here was the white pigeon!

It brought him up with a sudden shock. He had absolute sense of conviction. He knew that the white woman aboard, whom the white man was protecting with his excellent rifle fire, was young and desirable and that she was destined for Wong Fu Li's harem, unless something like a miracle intervened.

His rage at the man who had come so close to shooting him shifted into anger, streaked with ironic humor, against Wong Fu Li. The millionaire mandarin had overplayed his own hand. He had not known the proper value of his cards. He had imagined that because a white man was close to the gutter he would pander to a yellow man's lusts at the expense of his own race!

This second rage was cold, stimulating.

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Wong's mistake had committed the men he thought his tools to the achievement of something like the miracle needed to rescue the white pigeon from the nest already prepared for her in Macao. Little flashes of remembrance hurried through O'Connell's brain even while he was formulating plans, gripping Brownbill by the wrist and telling him to "come along, it is all right."

The high-pitched music and the shrill laughter from the hidden balcony as the four of them halted in Wong Fu Li's gardens.

The murderous flash in Wong Fu Li's eyes as he surveyed his clumsy servant!

The voice of the majordomo.

"So, brother of my wife, if you do not bring back the white pigeon it would be as well for you to purchase a cord of yellow silk, for I warn you that he is very set upon it."

Wong Fu Li, in his palanquin, fondling his sleeve dog, looking forward sensuously to——

He thrust these aside, concentrating all his nervous energy to the job in hand. With three men, all older than himself, two of them half drunk, the third opium-softened; he had to gain the confidence of the white man who guarded the white pigeon and he had to get them both free, away from the steamer, somewhere to safety—against Quong and all the crew of the *Lily*.

He vaguely heard the engine-room bell ring for stoppage, knew that the other vessel was slowing down, listened without answering to Brownbill's incessant questioning of—

"Wot's up, I s'y?"

The shore! They had got to get ashore. To make land before they were missed. Celebes, extreme north and south, was fairly civilized. Far north of them was Tondano, across the narrow peninsula Menado. They both had Dutch officials, white population. But both were too far. Anywhere in Menada Province would do. There were missionary stations, good roads, people living under an authority and protection that even Wong Fu Li would not challenge. But the Menadan border was far away to the north.

To work along the coast line was to risk capture by the followers of Celebean chiefs who were outside jurisdiction, who would almost certainly hold them for ransom—if not worse. What traders there were would be Malay or Arab, none too friendly to such a landing, almost certain to be in league with the *Ehr mu fuan*, to give later information to Quong, pursuing.

Somehow to get ashore before dawn, to work over the mountains and hit Polgar or Amurang! It must be done.

He had no time to advise Brownbill in the swift work of lowering the boat. A gangway had been rigged by the surrendering crew who stood huddled together, submissively throwing down their weapons as Quong reviewed them, displaying his ring with the token of "The Beast" to cringing coolies. Half a score of dead lay in drips and puddles of their own blood. The body of the Portuguese skipper was in the scuppers.

A half-naked horde poured up from below, headed by another bearded man, evidently the engineer. He carried a pistol; half raised it as he demanded to know what had happened. Quong shot him down with his sentence half delivered.

"You speak along that white man, O'Connell," he said, an increased and arrogant authority in his voice. "You tell him we no hu't. Only want what steal from us. No flighten l'il lady."

It was pretty obvious to O'Connell that Quong looked on him and his three fellows as pawns who had played their part in strategy and might now at any moment be traded off the board. The game was practically won for Quong. All but the gathering of rewards. O'Connell mustered a half grin and checked his desire to blow out Quong's brains.

He went aft to the deckhouse, sidled along, Brownbill following him, mystified and curious. Near the porthole, still open, away from a chance shot, O'Connell spoke:

"They say there's a white man here, and a white woman. There is no danger to you if you stop trying to pick us off. You have nothing to do with the quarrel, which is a trade matter."

"You are a white man?"

"I am that. There are two of us here. Two more aboard. I give you my word neither of you shall be harmed."

"The captain told me you were pirates. I hear you have killed him and more."

"I'm tellin' you that is a trade matter," said O'Connell. "The one side always calls the other a pirate, especially when they lose.

"Are you in command of that vessel?"

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"The *Lily of Chefoo?* I'm the mate, O'Connell. The supercargo's with me, Brownbill. Boyd is skipper and Menzies Chief Engineer. America, England, Scotland and the Irish Republic. Even if we are pirates we four white men are not going to see a white woman harmed or another white man get the worst of it. I don't know your name and I didn't know you were on the boat, but I'm givin' you the best of advice and I suggest you take it quickly. I've a strong notion this boat is not goin' much further."

He purposely injected a certain whimsicality into his voice though the seriousness of his talk was manifest enough. He caught the sound of a woman's voice—a girl's, soft, persuasive—like the coo of a pigeon. The man's answer—

"I'll come out if I can keep my arms."

"I think that's a fine plan, if you'll keep 'em out of sight. Dont bring your rifle. These chinks are a bit touchy. If the lady can tuck away a gun that would be a fine thing too."

There was a pause and then the door opened. A tall, thin man in white drill stepped outside, surveying O'Connell and Brownbill keenly.

He was bronzed and he wore glasses. Back of the thick, obscuring lenses his hazel eyes were angry and perturbed. A man of high intelligence, O'Connell swiftly rated him, but nervous, swifter of temper than of real decisions. He had fired straight enough and fast enough, but now that the situation opened and became more complex, he was puzzled. An elderly man—his pointed beard streaked with gray—not a merchant nor a trader, not at all a man used to the rougher side of the humanities—hard to place aboard this steamer.

"I don't understand the situation at all. You say we are in danger. That I can well imagine. In the same breath you advise me that you and three other white men are in command of that piratical steamer."

"I wish to God we were. It's a riddle, I'm grantin' you that. I've no time to try an' explain it to ye but, if ye don't follow my lead, 'tis one ye'll likely be answerin' in hell or heaven, an' the lady prayin' to be with ye, either place. You've got a choice between rascals maybe, but ye've got to choose mighty quick between white an' yellow, between your own race or chinks. I'll have small chance to talk to ye after the next minute or so. Make up your mind and don't waste time."

The man hesitated, his eyes troubled, dim with indecision. A girl came out of the cabin, her arm putting him aside. She too was in white and bare-headed. As O'Connell saw her standing there in the prismatic beam of the searchlight, he caught his breath, his heart held its beats, he forgot the killed men close by, the blood on the decks, the murder that had been done, their own jeopardies.

FOR here indeed was *the white pigeon! A white and golden pigeon!* Her hair was almost as yellow and as fine as the silk spun from Hankow cocoons, her skin was fair and velvety and firm as Stephanotis blossoms, and her big eyes, full on O'Connell, seeking his, looking deep into them with a magical divination, were bluer than midchannel waters. And the grace of her, the sweet womanliness that invested her, that came from her as perfume from a flower, captured the soul of O'Connell even as he understood—with tightening fists—its value in the lecherous eyes of Wong Fu Li.

To the Irishman the emotion it aroused was one handed down half a million years through all the generations of men, brought—who knows—through millions more in transmission while evolution slowly worked its destinies, the primal resolution to keep the tribal females inviolate—protectiveness. To him, with sex dull within him, she stood not so much as one woman, superlative, but as woman, potential mother of unborn generations of his own race.

She stood without fear, judging him, and out of O'Connell's ancient ribaldries, his illy-reared regard of women as playthings, the emotion became dominant within him, flaming, showing in his eyes, cleansing the smirched soul in its ancient crucible as the dross slagged away from the gold.

"Father," said the girl—there was the faintest trip of brogue on her tongue—"I am sure we can trust Mr. O'Connell. Let us do what he suggests."

She smiled at O'Connell and Brownbill. The supercargo took off his hat. Her voice thrilled through O'Connell as strangely as a wind might sweep through an old hall and, lifting ivy screens, evoke chords from the strings of a rotting, rusting harp, forgotten on the walls.

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In his Irish heart he had dreamed of such a woman, such a voice, but never thought to meet, to hear. She stood to him for all the gracious things of womanhood, for the things he had known little enough of—maidenhood, maternity, sanctity. Sleek Wong Fu Li—where and how had he seen her?

"Psst!" warned Brownbill.

The *comprador* was coming swiftly toward them, his eyes half suspicious, leering at the girl.

"You speak along of him? Make all fixee?"

"They understand we didn't imagine there was any one like them aboard, Quong. Shall I take them back to the *Lily*? Fighting's all over, I suppose? You'll be goin' through the cargo?"

Quong surveyed him carefully and O'Connell wondered if he had made his voice sufficiently casual. Much depended on his chance to talk soon with these two.

"I'll take good care of 'em," he added, injecting a quizzical strain into his tone, winking swiftly at the *comprador*. Quong drew him apart.

"Much betteh suppose you do," he said emphatically. "That I'il pigeon belong along Wong Fu Li. He velly glad see her. You *sabe?*"

"I *sabe* you're a fox, Quong Yick," answered O'Connell while his fingers curled and twitched to get about the *comprador's* full neck. "You're a sly one. Thought you wanted her for yourself. Can't let anything happen to her. She means a bonus—eh? What about her father?"

"I got no talk along what I do with him." Quong slightly turned the pistol in his hand and started to move off.

O'Connell caught him by his loose sleeve, half jovially, as one would detain a comrade. Fellowship was in his voice, the fellowship of bloody thieves and murderers though the cold sweat stood in a globuled ring about his forehead.

"That's your affair," he said. "But, look ye, Quong, there's no sense in scarin' that pigeon to death. If I had a fine bird to deliver, I'd see it came to market sleek an' fat, with its feathers unruffled, its eye bright an' a song in its heart, not dreamin' of the cage nor droopin' for a shattered nest. Kill him, you fool, and it'll be a sorry pigeon ye'll be handin' Wong Fu Li. And a sorry bonus we'll all be gettin' out of this business that's taken up more time than a dozen women would be worth—to my thinkin'."

O'Connell was convincing because he was the real thing, a man lying, playing the *rôle* of a villain to save a woman. It did not occur to Quong that there might be degrees in O'Connell's rascality. He knew him for a white man who had long ago lost visible signs of respectable living and Quong did not suspect his master's hirelings of any reservations that would not melt before the warming prospect of financial gain. If the Irishman had been a younger man——

Also Quong had individual grafts of his own to attend to. Aside from special merchandise that he must fairly account for, there would be good pickings for a careful man in the loot of the captured steamer before he followed orders and, opening seacocks, consigned the craft to eight hundred fathoms of salt water with the bodies of the dead.

The Portuguese skipper and engineer were the only two who might have made trouble and they were out of the way. The Chinese dead would never disturb the high seat of Wong Fu Li, entrenched behind the friendship of Macao officialdom, a barricade well cemented by *kumshaw*. Those living were afraid of the *Ehr mu juan*. They were an unlicensed crowd to whom piracy was merely an advantageous opportunity. To be on the winning side was always a good thing. The *Lily of Chefoo* took them in as auxiliaries. Wages were low, food cost little. Even if they babbled none would believe a coolie whose oath can be bought for a jingle of copper cash.

Quong was glad to turn over the pigeon and her father to O'Connell. He had considered the Irishman for some time and respected his brains, marveling that he had not been better able to feather his own nest, attributing that defect to the Irish instability that is a byword among many nations. Boyd, Menzies and Brownbill he classed lower—as drunkards—of grain spirit or poppy extract—but he could foresee good things ahead with a man like O'Connell to work with, one who would be well satisfied with excitement and a fair share of the visible profits—leaving the pickings for Quong.

And this plan for keeping the pigeon well feathered and content up to the last moment was a rare one! Wong Fu Li could appreciate such humor. The fact that her father was alive and entirely amenable to

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Wong's mercy might well be used by that crafty mandarin as a means of inducing the white pigeon to perform the tricks desired of her without reluctance.

There was a glint of admiration in his slant eyes.

"You take. I come soon. Maybe cap'en give cabin."

"Sure he will. I'll send the boat back to ye."

Quong went amidships again, disappearing below. The hatches were off, the crew of the *Lily*, save for those still herding the surrendered coolies back of a rope, not knowing their fate but phlegmatically philosophic, swarmed about the prize like ants raiding the galleries of a captured fortress. The dead were all in the scuppers, dragged by the heels, laid face-downwards, smears of blood on the planks marking their trails.

O'Connell tried to keep away the attention of the girl and her father though he was not entirely averse to having some grim facts sink into them. But it was plain that they saw the bodies. The man shuddered, the face of his daughter blanched.

A sideladder had been rigged, the two port boats of the *Lily* swung close below the grating platform. O'Connell and Brownbill preempted four reluctant coolies to row them over to the *Lily*, promising them speedy return to their share in the loot.

From the *Lily* he gave permission to more to leave. The only ones remaining were those on duty in the fireroom and on deck watch. With the engines stopped, stokers, oilers and assistants had come on deck and, with the deck crew, were crowded to the rail watching the scurry of their fellows under the beam of the searchlight with envious eyes—eyes that had only passing present interest for the strangers coming aboard. O'Connell escorted the two into the main cabin, sending Brownbill to rout up Menzies and Boyd.

"Sandy's asleep," said Brownbill. "An' the skipper's soused."

"Then he'll have to sober up. An' bring Menzies on the jump. We've got to get these folks out of this, Brownie. Tell you more about it when you come back."

Brownbill looked admiringly at the girl, a bit vacuously at her father. His brain, denied its usual opium, was a bit dull. Beyond a vague reasoning that the *Lily* was an unfit place for any woman, the supercargo did not reason. But he went off to get his mates.

O'Connell seated the two at the table, set out whisky and charged water, persuaded both to take some and saw color come back into the girl's cheeks and lips. The liquor seemed to galvanize her father more effectually. He started to speak, but O'Connell checked him.

"There's little time to waste," he said. "While they're looting your boat we'll be safe for a bit, but there's no knowing when Quong Yick will be back. He's acting for Wong Fu Li? Did you ever see, hear, or meet, with Wong Fu Li, of Macao?"

Both shook their heads. His sharp catechism had induced in them prompt and crisp reply. And it rather upset O'Connell's calculations. Still he was sure now that this was "the white pigeon."

"He's a dirty scoundrel," he said. "And Boyd, Menzies, Brownbill and myself are four disreputable blackguards who have been hired by him for general villainy because no one wants us any longer for decent jobs. As respectable citizens we're washouts, all four of us. But there's some manhood in us, I'm hopin'. I heard talk about a 'white pigeon' Quong Yick was to bring back from this trip—you see we are only nominally in command. Quong is the owner's real representative. I talk Cantonese and Mandarin—Quong don't know that—and I've confirmed that 'white pigeon' business in more ways than one. If Quong don't deliver the 'pigeon' he'll enter wood—which is the Chinese way of mentioning a wooden kimono. I'm talking blunt, now, miss. You're the 'white pigeon!' "

He checked the father's speech again with an uplifted hand. The girl said nothing, questioning him with her eyes. She had the pluck of a queen, he told himself.

"You've got to believe this," he said. "The four of us 'll get you out of this. You can weigh up whether we'd make this sort of a proposition to you if we didn't see desperate danger to both of ye. We're all white—I'm thinkin' you two are partly Irish, at that. You've seen enough tonight to know there's not much thought of life or decency in this crowd. Maybe you're linin' us up with the chinks. Which is natural enough. Only, we wouldn't be wantin' to duck an' run an' lose our share of the loot just for fun. Would we? My

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pals 'll be here in a minute. I wish you'd tell me how you came to be travelin' on that boat."

"My name is O'Shaugnessy. Royle O'Shaugnessy," said the man. He spoke like one still in the grip of happenings that had shaken him from full control. "I am a botanist and entomologist of important commercial affiliations." O'Connell's lips twitched involuntarily at the pompous syllables. "I have been many months in Java, Celebes, the Moluccas, striving to find certain insects that have been credited with the ability and instinct to destroy the pollen of certain noxious growths that infest plantation lands. These insects I have finally been able to segregate.

"Meanwhile, my wife died. My daughter, without advising me, without means of advising me owing to my route, immediately sailed to join me, reaching Singapore from Hongkong and connecting mailboat to Batavia, railroad to Surabaya. She got in touch with acquaintances there, but they could only tell her I had gone on to either the South West or the South East Islands, perhaps to Timor Laut, on the trail of my beetle.

"It was an ill-advised trip to make. It would have been better for her to await my return in Surabaya. But of course she did it for the best."

"Not a doubt of it," put in O'Connell, with hard work of it to keep his opinion of Royle Shaugnessy out of his tone and manner. "How did she come to find you, after all?"

"It was quite unusual, quite. You tell him, Sheila, I have never quite understood it."

SHEILA—Sheila O'Shaugnessy! It was the name for a hawk's mate, rather than the name of a pigeon, but O'Connell had already interpreted many signs that the term rated only her appearance in the fancy of Chinese metaphor. Yet, fight with desperate pride with furious claws and beak as she might, she would be but a white pigeon after all in Wong's long, nervous fingers.

"I suppose it was peculiar," she said. "But I had made many inquiries and the news of a stranger spreads quickly in such places. I had asked, of course, principally among the owners of vessels. There are lots of them sailing from Surabaya in every direction that are not owned by any lines, but independent. Of course you know that better than I do. It did seem a foolish quest that I had come on but I had no communications with father—he did not even know mother had died. I was quite alone. There were only the two of us. So I tried my best.

"They brought a message one day to my hotel at Surabaya that a wealthy Chinese *paranak* from Solo had news for me. Of course I saw him immediately. He told me that he had heard father was on one of the small islets of the South East Group and that he owned a steamer—or he had interest with the owners, I forget which—that was bound for Timor Laut and would stop at this island, taking me as passenger. That he would take me and father off on the return voyage if father was ready to come. He knew of father and his work. I investigated and found the man was a reputable merchant and, although neither the Dutch or the Javanese have much use for these wealthy Chinese *paranaks*, so I am told, I was advised that his information was probably correct and that I would run little risk in taking the voyage since I was so determined on joining father.

"I was wonderfully treated. Father was not quite ready to return. We missed that steamer—rather, we could not take passage when it came—but the captain promised to have another call and it did. This was the steamer you just brought us from, and father arranged for us to return directly to Hongkong. He had little baggage outside of his scientific outfit and that was always with him. I had brought all mine. It seemed a special opportunity."

" 'Twas meant to be," said O'Connell.

"D' 'ye remember the name of that *paranak?*"

"Tun Yen."

Brownbill descended the companion, followed by Boyd and Menzies. That he had prepared them for meeting O'Shaugnessy and his daughter was plainly seen in the owlish gravity in which Boyd had covered his potations, and Menzies' fresh drill suit. O'Connell rose—

"Any sign of Quong, Brownie?"

"Not yet."

"Then we'll get together in a hurry." He made the introductions and swiftly sketched what he had heard behind the banyan and Quong's identification of Sheila O'Shaugnessy as the "white pigeon."

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"Of course this Tun Yen was an agent of Wong," he concluded. "Somewhere Wong must have seen Miss O'Shaugnessy. 'Tis not the point. That is to get her clear. I'm supposin' you're with me?"

Menzies blinked before he answered. Beneath his lids his eyes were set, he spoke with visible effort, his whole body and nervous system appeared sluggish. It was clear that he was making a prodigious effort to clear himself from the fumes of the liquor he had taken, to show himself sober. O'Connell surveyed his three pals of misfortune with a dubious sort of gaiety. The die was cast, there was no question as to who was to be the leader, but he had a sorry set of followers.

O'Shaugnessy was sober but he was of the fussy type, lacking endurance of body as of mind. Brownbill needed the spur of opium, yet to give it to him now meant temporary oblivion before the drug worked any betterment. That was the hell of opium, its devilish paradox. You could not get along without it and, with it, you were fifty per cent. unavailable. Boyd and Menzies might pull themselves together, but they were drunk, however they might cover it.

O'Connell knew the curse of liquor as well as its blessings, though with him the latter usually discounted the former. He had seen it save men's lives when they needed an immediate urge. Equally he knew its toxic drag. How long would these ageing men last against the tremendous task bound to lie ahead of them? As long as the girl, perhaps.

"To get her clear is no' the point," said Menzies. "'Tis *how*. I'll do what share I can though, mind ye, I'm not the man I was."

O'Connell could have kicked him. There were tears of self-pity showing in the glassy eyes. The engineer was almost maudlin.

"It's simple enough," said the mate. "And the only way I can see. They're looting the steamer. They'll likely get half drunk with excitement and finish the job with *samshu* or anything else that's aboard. They won't think of us till they're through, I'm hopin'. Quong may. At present the men aboard are all at the port-rail watching. I want Boyd an' Brownie to get the stern boat lowered. Get rifles and grub into it. Enough grub for about five meals. It'll be over by then, one way or another. Cartridges count for more than grub. We'll get into her down the falls. Then we'll row like —— for shore, keepin' out of the chance of the searchlight. We'll have to make it before dawn. Then up into Menada Province over the hills. If they spot us they'll steam after us, likely. Menzies, you'll look after that. We don't dare to start till Quong has seen Mr. O'Shaugnessy and his daughter fixed up in Boyd's cabin. I told him I'd see to that. Brownie, ye might slip up an' see if there's sight of Quong. We don't want him to catch us together. Or any other spy."

"Lassie," said Menzies, "I'd spill my heart's bluid befo' I saw ye deleevered into the hands o' the heathen. I'm gangin' noo to put the quieetus on the finest engines I've handled since I cam' oot o' Glasgy. Ye may rely on O'Connell there. He's got a better heid than any o' us, an' he hasna misused it so much—o' late."

With a little fumbling Menzies lit a cigar. But he resolutely ignored the whisky and stalked off to his engines.

"We're wastrels, all four of us, Miss O'Shaugnessy," said Boyd, and, despite his owlish ponderosity there was dignity to him, some of the poise and assurance of his old days. "Gentlemen of Misfortune, but still gentlemen, I hope, my dear. I have drunk too deeply of the cup of life myself, the draughts have been sweet and bitter and of late I have begun to taste the dregs—and fear them. But this chance shows me there is yet a measure of good wine left and with it I pledge the will and strength of my comrades and myself to your fortune."

He looked about him as if for a waiter with a foaming glass. With his Bacchic melodrama he was effective, handsome, sounding a note that rang true. His hand touched a decanter, fingers closed about it, lifted it. He regarded it, frowned at it, set it down—

"This is no time for pot—pot valanshy."

He reddened at the treachery of his tongue, straightened, bowed slightly.

"You may rely on us getting the boat away. Mr. Brownbill, are you ready, sir? We'll take the rifles."

Brownbill came down the companion.

"No sign of Quong yet," he reported. "Look here, there's one thing. I'm in pritty bad shape. My 'eart's fair rotten. Wot are you goin' to do w'en you git ashore? 'Ook it over the 'ills to Hamurang?"

"Probably."

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"I'm a punk shot," went on Brownbill, the girl staring at him half unbelievingly, O'Connell beginning to wonder a little. " 'Ow about me stayin' be'ind? My 'eart 'ud keep me from climbin' farst, I'm played out as a fightin' man. Never was. My tongue was allus all my —— fortune. Wot price if I stay?"

"They'd likely skin you alive, Brownie. Even if they thought you weren't in it they'd take it out on you. Besides——"

"You don't get me, matey, you don't get me. They'll likely do me up ennyhow, go or stay. But 'ow about me stallin' 'em all I could an' then scraggin' Quong? I cud do that an' welcome. Do 'im up now an' the rest 'ud pile on yer. Scrag 'im later, with you out of the w'y, and you'd 'ave 'em runnin' round in circles. Mebbe if I got 'old of that ring of Wong's I cud round 'em up."

O'Connell's eyes lit up.

"It won't do, little man," he said affectionately. "It wouldn't work. There are others who'd take after us. Quong's the boss but some of the rest are far from fools. They'd have to report to Wong Fu Li or the *Ehr mu fuan*. That ring on your finger wouldn't be worth more than a bit of glass. You'll come with us, Brownie. Man, I almost misjudged you. Now, up with you."

"Where and what is Amurang?" demanded O'Shaugnessy. "My daughter and myself——"

"It's a mission station on the north coast of Celebes. If you get there you're safe. They'll never try to get you once you cross the borders of Menada Province though ye had better try to make Menada as soon as possible. The missionaries will see you through——"

"And you," broke in the girl, "what of you?"

"We'll be right along with you, Miss O'Shaugnessy. But, after we get over the mountains 'tis the missionaries who'll help you more than we will."

He smiled at her, but she did not smile back.

"You are leaving everything," she said. "I don't know that we can repay you. Father and I—Father, do you realize what they are sacrificing, what they are doing?"

"Why—er, yes, my dear. I shall be glad to do what I can. To testify, to endeavor to get them reinstated. You see, according to their own account—they are——"

"Flotsam of the sea. Sailors with a chance to do their duty. 'Tis not the first berth we've shifted in a hurry. Would you have us stay an' get blood-money for deliverin' you over to Wong Fu Li? Do you imagine that he would either entertain your father as a guest for any length of time or let him go clear to the nearest consulate? It is you who are wanted, Miss Sheila, not your father. What would you be thinkin' of me an' the rest of us if we let you go?"

"I would not be thinkin' you were the same men at all, at all," she answered. "Oh, but you are *men*. If I could but love you all. 'Tis the only way a woman can reward man."

"But our love-makings are past. The least said of them maybe the better. 'Tis not only for the love of you we do this thing, Miss Sheila. 'Tis for the love of ourselves. 'Faith we're thinkin' we're a fine crowd an' we're tickled to death with ourselves. What is it, Brownie?"

The supercargo stage whispered down through the open skylight—

"Quong comin' orf."

"Thank God for that. I was afraid he'd delay things. Got to have him feeling easy before we make our move. There's the skipper's cabin. Into it, both of you. I'll try and send in some food an' ye must eat it. Be ready to start at any second. 'Twill be touch an' go."

HE GOT them in the cabin before Quong's boat touched the gangway platform. O'Connell stood up straight to receive him, filling his lungs deep. Touch and go. That was the glory of the game. A gamble. A good gamble. Nothing to win for himself but regained respect, and much good that would do him without job or money. But a fine game for high stakes. Life against death and a woman's dishonor. To —— whether he got any share of the winnings. The thing was to win.

He set down a glass as Quong came down the ladder, aping the jovial mood of semi-drunkenness. He jerked his thumb toward the captain's quarters with a ribald wink as Quong set down on the table the heavy bags of canvas that had filled both arms.

"Got the li'l pigeon caged safe, Quong," he said thickly. "Goin' to send in some birdseed an' water by an' by. Tol' her we'd take her to Hongkong. Brownbill kidded 'em too. Good li'l pal, Brownie."

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"How about Boyd and Menzies?" O'Connell shrugged his shoulders.

"Skipper's soused. Dead to the worl'. In my bunk. Menzies is half-seas over an' messin' about his engines. Wants to know if he's got to keep steam up all night. Say, Quong, open up the booze locker, will ye? An' Brownie's howlin' for some *yen hok*."

Quong's eyes narrowed. O'Connell could see it suited him that the white four were celebrating. He gave O'Connell a key.

"Can do. I catch *yen hok* one minnit. You like looksee?"

O'Connell bent over the table as Quong opened up the mouths of his heavy, well-stuffed bags. The shine of coarse gold dust caught the light of the lamps. From an inside pocket of his blouse he produced a long poke of soft leather and poured some of its contents into the palm of his hand. There issued a stream of milky radiance. Pearl after pearl of perfect roundness and luster—all whites—clicked softly.

The "white pigeon" had not been the only thing the voyage was concerned in. Here were the gleanings of many beaches, selected from fifty times their measure of faultier pearls, baroques, seeds. Quong chuckled and showed a smaller sack, replacing the first. This he entirely emptied.

There were eleven gems in the hollow of his hand and from them came a soft fire of iridescence. Quong gave a swift look around and upward and dexterously laid them one by one on the red damask of the cabin table. All of these were whites but they were far larger—magnificent. Three pairs were matched. Two sets of pears, one of slightly flattened discs. The other five were each gems whose finding would be the talk of a fishery for a season. Their value was enormous—even to a dealer. Some day a millionaire would pay high for a pendant from these, unless they stayed in Wong's collection. Many good things stayed in China.

The whole display was juggled by Quong within less than a minute. Then he knelt before a steel safe, set flush with the panels of the cabin, twirling the combination.

"One bittee along all this belong along us," said Quong. "Clew, they get some along what they find on ship. *Maskee* what they not know along this. *Maskee* what any one not know. Lilly time I give you bittee along of you. You makee split with Boyd, Blownbill, Menzies."

The suggestion was obvious. O'Connell might rook his friends and Quong did not care. O'Connell was being rewarded for fidelity to Wong's interests. The Irishman's head was aflame with temptation. To kill Quong then and there, drag his body into a stateroom and then to make their getaway before discovery. It might be done. Quong deserved death. To loot a pirate was no crime. Ahead lay a few years yet that could be filled with pleasure. Why not?

The door of the captain's cabin opened and the girl came out, stopping abruptly as she saw Quong, then, speaking to O'Connell:

"My father—wants to know if there is any chance of getting his collection cases from the other ship? They are the work of two years. I——" Speech died in her at the sight of Quong's silent laugh.

He had his tongue showing between his yellow teeth and he looked like a hyena as his eyes roved over her figure.

"No can do," he said. "Lilly bittee fly? Coolie they find along that cabin. They think all same medicine. No good. Thlow away. Solly."

"Oh!" Sheila O'Shaugnessy went back into the stateroom on the syllable, glad to get away from Quong's appraisal.

"All their duds looted?" asked O'Connell. "The girl will want some sort of change to make her look her best later on."

"Can do. Plenty stuff along that boat."

Quong, still haunched, closed the door of the safe. O'Connell's moment had passed. The girl had dismissed it.

"I get *yen hok*," said Quong, well pleased with himself. "Then I go back along ship. Byanby she empty, we sink."

He disappeared in his own room, emerged, gave O'Connell a small supply of opium and went above, ordering his boat. O'Connell strode to the door of the captain's cabin, rapped.

"Stand by," he said.

Going silently on deck he found all hands forced to stay aboard glued to the side of the steamer, watching. There were bundles of selected loot under the glare of the search-lights piled up ready for transshipment, bales of stuff, boxes. Some of the bales were ripped, showing spurts of silk and brocade. Spices had been strewn broadcast and the air reeked with them. Coolies came up from below, adding to the piles, diving down again for more. A cask of wine had been discovered, uphauled to the deck, its

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head knocked in, its contents free to all who dipped with a convenient bailer. Quong was not in sight.

O'Connell slipped like a shadow to the port stern davits. Boyd and Brownbill were at the falls. The boat was already lowered, its keel slapping the water with a flaming touch as the steamer rolled.

"All in," whispered Brownbill. " 'Ow's the charnces?"

"Good. I'll bring them up. Brownie, go get Menzies. He's doing something to put the engines out of commission. Make yourselves both conspicuous. Play drunk. Laugh. But don't let 'em see you come aft. I've got some *yen hok* for you. You can take your outfit."

"Thank ——! But I won't need a pipe. No dreams in this trip. I'll take pills. So long."

"Feelin' fit?" O'Connell asked Boyd after Brownbill had gone.

"Better than I have in twenty years, my lad."

O'Connell peered at Boyd in the starlight. There was still the raw smell of spirits on the skipper's breath, but there was only one opinion about his sobriety. The captain had gone back twenty years. He had accepted responsibility. He had seen clean duty ahead of him once more and set his course for it. He showed upright, square of shoulder, vigorous. He slapped O'Connell on the shoulder.

"You're a good man, O'Connell. A good man. I would have liked to have had one like you. Maybe—" For a moment he looked out over the dark sea with its pale gleams of seafire, and sighed. "You're running this, O'Connell, as you started it. No seniority. I may not last through."

O'Connell felt Boyd's hand, gripped it. He met Brownbill and Menzies at the funnel. Five minutes later found them all assembled by the davits. O'Connell looped a bight, took a turn about a cleat. He sent Brownbill down to steady the boat, picked up the girl and lightly set her feet in the loop, bidding her hold on by the falls as he lowered her. Her father followed, then the others. Cautiously they fended off from the side and took the oars, one to each of them, sitting paired, ignoring steering, paddling away, turning the blades in the water, where fire flowed at the slightest obstruction to the long swing of the waves. To the west, above the dark loom of the land, intermittently the glare of the volcano beaconed them.

The bulks of the two steamers, close together, the searchlights aplay on the midsection of the captured craft, seemed so startling a hub to the wheel of darkness circling all about that O'Connell marveled —though he knew native habits—that some stray proas had not gathered out of curiosity. There might be some lurking between steamers and shore. There assuredly would be a fleet of them setting out soon after dawn.

Dawn was so imminent, compared with that long pull to a landing, that the loophole of their escape seemed one too narrow to contemplate. O'Connell stroked, conserving strength and measure for the sake of his crew, doubting whether the captain would last the three hours that must mark the least space of time in which they could hope to reach the breaker line. Then came the problem of getting through the reef.

They had no spare time in which to row far enough away to get out of the reach of the searchlights should they be missed. In three hours and a half, at the most, dawn would be upon them, leaping out of the sea with equatorial rapidity. And, with dawn, would come the discovery of the missing boat—of them. Their one hope of complete escape lay in getting into the cover of the dense jungle before the inevitable chase commenced, to get there unseen by natives.

"What did ye do with the engines, Menzies?" he called out over his shoulder to the engineer, laboring with the skipper. Brownbill rowed beside the Irishman.

"I didna ha' the heart to spoil them. But they wull ha' some sma' deefeeculty in makin' steam, I'm thinkin'. The unruly de'ils were all on deck an' I had nane to observe me. When they open the handwheels o' the injectors they'll but add soft soap to what I've already filled the boilers wi'."

That was the last of the talk. Hour after hour they tugged patiently at the long sweeps that became heavier and heavier in hands long unused to hard manual work, that brought agony to debilitated muscles and strained hearts that had slackened their beat for the downhill of life. O'Connell found himself hard put to it and knew himself twice as potential as any of the rest, listening to the labor of Brownbill, struggling doggedly beside him, the gasps of the skipper, the grunts of Menzies.

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Still the searchlights flared over the two steamers. Steadily the loom of the land lifted. Now they could get the smell of jungle flowers and herbs in the pulse of the offshore breeze, the drumroll of the surf grew momentarily louder O'Connell's keen eyes could make out the distant, gray, ghostly shapes of mounting, breaking rollers.

One searchlight died, the other lifted, penciling vertically, hovering uncertain while they stopped rowing with held breaths and cowered to make their target less.

But the beam did not turn in their direction. Instead, it vanished and they could see two rows of twinkling lights. The looting was over. Would Quong try to awaken them? He would want steam, miss Menzies, unless he meant to stand by until he sank the gutted trader, destroyed that witness of raid. That might keep all hands on deck a while longer.

The momentary cessation made the picking-up of the stroke again a disheartening realization of their draining strength. They were in a reef current and it took them north —the way they wanted to go. The breakers were less than a mile away, but, in the darkness, O'Connell could see no opening. They edged in, painful stroke by stroke, soft hands torn, every inch of flesh protesting.

In the east O'Connell saw the premonitory sky-shiver of the sunrise. Quicken or lengthen the feeble stroke he could not. It would mean collapse. He looked back. One row of lights was tilting, sinking—gone!

UP ROLLED the sun. Incredibly, as if at a prompter's signal, with an electrician determined to beat all records for changing, the night fled and day was upon them. Purple sky and ebon lands, dull glare of the volcano, yellow stars, lights of the distant *Lily*—all were gone and the garish secondary colors of the dawn omniscient.

The *Lily of Chefoo* was just a speck, a pencil mark against the rolling orb of the sun, the sky was the color of green jade with pink clouds trailing high up. The shore line of Celebes showed in raw greens with purple shadows, with high bare peaks of vermilion wrapped in sulfur colored mists that were valleyed in lavender. A smudge hung above the volcano of Supiyat. Close to them the great waves reared and smashed in thunder, in streams of cobalt and spouts of iridescent foam.

A plume of smoke puffed up from sea—out of the *Lily's* funnel. The chase was up. They were making fires. Menzies gave a painful chuckle. His face was lined and drawn with effort. All four of them, thought O'Connell, looked like gray baboons. The girl and her father showed less strain. But she read something in O'Connell's features, masked with rigid fatigue though they were.

"They're after us?"

"They are. But we've got a fine start."

His eyes glinted as they sought the reef. His voice was hoarser than a seabird's. Day, stark, unfriendly day, left them naked. The friendly cover of night had meant everything. There might not be an opening in the coral for miles.

He drew in his too scanty breath with a gasp. Far ahead a crimson triangle glided out from the reef, the sun-painted sail of a proa. They were well down to leeward, the sail screened them, they might not be seen. He ordered them to crouch, keeping one oar out to keep head on to the reef-rollers that might broach them.

The proa swept seaward, making for the steamer. Its occupants had not seen them.

Now they were fairly in the clutch of circumstances and they must run the gauntlet of many odds. Through the reef entrance they must go. They might meet other proas putting out. They had neither time nor means to win friendliness, which would gravitate toward Quong and the steamer because of the strength, rewards, very likely the influence of the *Ehr mu fuan*, as displayed by the signet.

The reef gate meant fresh water cutting through the coral—a stream—a village of sorts—at least a trading station, now wide awake.

They rowed on, turned into the channel as a second proa came gliding out on the land wind, its narrow, two-ended hull, crowded with flat-faced natives of *negrito* type, evidence of *Tagalog* migration. The black men jabbered as their light craft swept past the clumsier boat with its four tired white men, old, stolid, grim; the white girl with the golden hair in the stern beside another spectacled man whose face was patchy with apprehension.

Two more proas in the lagoon waters. A white beach with buildings in the trees, a flash of corrugated roofing dazzling in the

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sun. Curious figures running to surf edge. All these they saw in a daze of desperate weariness, like figures in a dream. Dark stilted mangroves mouthing a sluggish stream. Far back beyond the rolling hills a notch in granite crests. O'Connell marked that. It must be the pass through which they might win. Already he began to formulate a plan. If it was a narrow pass——

The two proas came close and sheered off at the still menace of O'Connell's rifle and Brownbill's automatic. Back of them Menzies and Boyd stroked feebly through the slack water toward the creek. They had to leave an open trail. They were ahead, they must keep so as long as possible and then fight it out. The mangroves shut out sight of the village, the beach, the sea itself as they followed its winding course. For the present it was their best road, their fastest.

Sheila O'Shaugnessy got at the food, divided it, gave out the rations. Exhausted as the four were they managed to refuel their machinery with the aid of whisky and water. Brownbill rolled himself a pellet of opium. There was no talk yet. The serious hazard of it all palled them, they conserved all effort. With the day the terrific heat of the Line sapped their strength. The world stewed in it. A myriad plaguesome insects surrounded them, biting viciously, blinding them, covering every inch of exposed flesh, driving them at last from the stream to where a narrow trail came down among rushes to a sandy spit.

The trail reached mountainwards and they took it. It ran between a tangle of jungle bush that wattled great trees where tailless baboons swung and chattered as they lurched on, soaked in sweat, slowly climbing, leaving with every step some residue of strength that could not be renewed before they achieved safety, if that was to be. They were shut off from all knowledge of what went on outside their narrow strip of trail with the steaming jungle hemming them in, seething with life. They heard the grunting of wild pigs. Birds scolded, fled with flashing wings against a background of emerald. Vines tripped them and they went staggering, single file. O'Connell led, Menzies brought up the rear.

When O'Connell halted the rest stopped without a word, without looking at each other's faces lest they should fine something there to overbalance the testy end of their own see-saw of hope and despair. The girl marched bravely, her father, somewhat used to tropic trails, was the best of all of them at this work.

The sun did not reach them though they knew by the retreat of the dawn-glow on the ridges that time had passed with its mounting, but its heat quivered all about, permeated them, boiled in their veins.

They came out on a grassy ridge where a sweep of air from some mountain chimney wrapped them in its grateful draught. They looked down, fearfully, out over the foothills, beyond the green lagoon and reef, craving a moment's rest, praying a little grace.

The *Lily of Chefoo* still lay far out with smoke rolling from the funnel as they vainly strove for steam. But, midway, there was a knot of proas—three of them—returning shorewards. Back of them lumbered a steamer's boat, lug-sailed. Quong, with his best men, would have taken passage on the faster proas.

A struggle over a plain where saw-grass cut to the bone, a tortuous climb over a lave ridge and they entered a forest of *kanari* trees. In the midst of it they came across a native liming birds. Swift as he started to run O'Connell's challenging bullet was faster, thudding into bark just ahead of him, bringing him to a sullen halt. Brownbill, with his supercargo's polygot, was the interviewer.

"There's a pass," he reported. "Where you thought it was, O'Connell. Up by the notch. Four 'ours' climb, 'e calls it. Other side leads down to Polgar. That's Menadar Province, 'way south of Amurang but safe enough. 'E says you can see the plantations from the top. 'E won't guide you, 'e says, but 'e will, with a pistol in 'is back. You can make it all right."

"Sure we'll make it," said O'Connell. "But not in four hours. You want to herd him, Brownie?"

"Not me, matey. I'm through. Not a —— step left in me. Worn down. Done."

He lifted eyes like a suffering monkey and O'Connell knew that he spoke the truth. The little Cockney's heart had gone back on him, for all his opium pellets. He breathed like a winded hound.

"Tell 'er I'm droppin' back for rear guard, O'C. I'll wait at the edge of the woods and try to pot 'em as they come over

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the top of the lava dyke. I'm a bum shot but you'll hear the gun an' know when they git this far. If I can croak Quong I'll die 'appy. They won't git me, O'C. I've got *yen hok* enough to fool 'em. So long, matey, cheerio!"

"We'll be holding them in the pass, Brownie. Lettin' the girl and her father go on. It'll be the only way."

"Sure. I reckon the four of us 'll 'ave to go. Bad rubbish savin' somethin' worth while. Not such a mucker windup, wot? Luck to yer. Don't tell 'er I'm foundered. 'It the trail."

As O'Connell looked back he saw Brownbill roll a pellet, swallow it and start to hobble back, supported by the trees, toward the lava. Sheila noticed his absence.

"They'll be coming along soon," he told her. "Got to have some one to bring up the rear."

THEIR impressed guide, with O'Connell's belt buckled to his gee-string, a gun muzzle between his shoulder-blades, led them on and up through groves of trees to bare ridges where the sun scorched their brains and their shadows crept, shrinking until the vertical shafts reduced them to a mockery of a few inches. They flung themselves exhausted in a cleft where some water oozed out, food impossible, whisky unthinkable, willing to lie there and die. To make a fighting stand and end it.

"We couldn't last long," panted O'Connell. " 'Tis not to be thought of. They'll not let us die. They can surround us here. They'll torture you inch by inch. We must get on. We've got to keep ahead. There are more trees presently. The pass is not so far."

The dull crack of a rifle sounded. Again. Twice more and then a spatter of firing. Then silence.

"They've got to Brownie," said Menzies. "Hope he got Quong."

"He stayed behind?" asked the girl with eyes dilated in horror.

"He couldn't come any further, Miss Sheila. He was all in. He was an old man, Brownie, old as the skipper here. His heart was no good."

"And you left him behind—to be tortured. I thought you were men!

Her lips were cracked, her tongue swollen and her face drawn. The serene beauty of the white pigeon had departed. Only her spirit showed plucky and indomitable. Now it accused. O'Connell met it cheerfully.

"He was the first who had to drop out, Miss. He won't be tortured. He's got his opium. He was a man and so are we. You're a woman."

"I won't be treated as one. You are not to sacrifice yourselves for me. Why—father—tell them—oh, stop him!"

The native had slyly cut the belt with a hidden knife, severing his fetter, gliding over the rock like a lizard. O'Connell's shot was too late, the man had gone.

They reached the pass at what O'Connell judged was four o'clock in the afternoon, a cleft in hard, steep walls that looked like the stroke of a giant axe. Its narrow corridor was blocked by a fallen crag and one by one they crawled about it, squeezing through to a tiny saddle of rock. Beyond, through the great blue V of the cleft, they saw its color grading in sea and sky. Below, forested foothills and then, far down the checkerboarding of orderly plantations, the ribbons of roads, signs of government, or order and protection—Menadar Province.

They were but a few minutes ahead of the pursuit. O'Connell had glimpsed them at intervals for the last hour, they had heard the yells with which Quong and his men had viewed their quarry. It seemed as if the last ounce of power had oozed out of them when they crawled into the gap. They were broken, bruised, bitten, with fever raging through them, dizzy and faint. Boyd half lay, half stood against the rock face with his eyes closed. Menzies showed his bared gums in a constant grin, the grin that the spent fox wears. The pass, the peaks, the pursuit, the vision of Menadar, the face of the girl, whirled about O'Connell, advanced, swelled like balloons, retreated. His veins stood out thickly, his flesh sagged, his eyes were deep-sunken but in him some thing exulted, told him—like a voice in a dream, dimly heard, not yet understood—

"You've won, you've beaten them after all, you've won!"

Won! How had he won? His hand shook so he could barely lift a pistol. *Won?* Inside of ten minutes they would be overtaken. There were fifty after them. Quong, with the threat of a bowstring already constricting his fat pig-like neck, and his myrmidons.

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O'Connell summoned up his soul from the depths of weariness. His vision cleared, he could see seams in the cliffs where—ultimately—with precarious climbing, foes could get above the pass, taking cover here and there and shoot them down—all they wanted to shoot.

He turned to O'Shaugnessy, shook him by the shoulder. The scientist was on his knees, not in prayer but exhaustion, head on his arms, sobbing from sheer weakness. His clothes, like those of the rest of them, were crusted with the salt of the sweat that had steamed and dried upon them, they were torn with thorn and hooking bough. His shoulder-blades heaved to each sob.

"Get up," said O'Connell. There had been phases of the trip where he had marveled that Sheila should be the daughter of this man and yet so happily have missed much of his meannesses, his cowardice. O'Connell had almost literally dragged him the last two miles, a shambling, spiritless thing and he was not patient in this crisis. He thought he would have liked to have known the girl's mother. 'Tis the women mold the men from the time they are conceived, he told himself.

He had hard time to keep his mind steady. Rambling thoughts would intrude for all the desperate moment at hand. His nerves were worn out, short-circuiting. In the past twelve hours he had burned up the reserves of twelve years—all he might have hoped to live.

"They are too close," said the girl, as her sodden father shrugged off O'Connell. "Let us kill all we can and then ourselves. I am ready."

She stood with her own revolver showing in her scratched, sun-scarlet fist.

"Sure you are," retorted O'Connell, and there was a flash of old-time mockery in his eyes as he surveyed her. "But I'm not. D'ye think we've been workin' for the fun of it. Would you be quitting now with the way out in sight?"

"I'm so tired," she moaned. "I can go no further. I'd rather die."

"Will you tell Brownbill that? That he stayed behind for naught? I'm thinkin' not, Miss Sheila. 'Tis not just you we're savin', girl. I've told you that before. It's all our women in one. Do you deny us manhood? Shame on ye."

It was silly how his chin wabbled and the tears came to his eyes when he spoke. He wanted to make a sentimental speech and he cursed himself for an emotional fool.

The whang of Menzies' rifle roared in the tiny gorge. From below there came an answer of sharper explosions, of bullets striking the rocks and leaving metal smears.

"Get up, —— ye, get up!" O'Connell shouted and yanked O'Shaugnessy to his feet.

"I'm dead beat," he said hoarsely. "Is this the end, O'Connell?"

"'Tis the beginning, you gomeril! An' the way's all downhill. Ye should make the settlements by sunset. You speak Dutch. We'll hold 'em off, if you'll hurry. Look, d'ye see the plantations?"

"Ah! Sheila. Sheila, my dear! Do you see them. We're saved!"

"We may be, father, if we go. What about these gentlemen?"

"What about us, Sheila, tell me that?" O'Connell laughed at her. "What would you be doin' in our shoes? Would you have us doin' otherwise? If you stay here, faith, you spoil the only decent thing we've tried to do for twenty years? Do you want to do us out of our hopes of salvation? Go along with ye, colleen. Go your ways and tell your childher how we saved their mother for them yet to be. Off with ye. Your ways!"

"O'Connell!" It was Menzies' voice, shrill, appealing.

O'Connell seized a rifle as the engineer's weapon spoke. Two men were stealing up a slant of the rock. At the fire one jerked to his knees then fell spinning—crashing down inside the barrier stone—almost at the girl's feet, shot just above the heart. The other tried to wriggle back to cover, gained it and lay hidden, Menzies sniping at him. Boyd had pulled himself together and was moving to Menzies' side, dragging a rifle.

"While we're arguin' with ye, they'll be on top of us," O'Connell cried.

He pushed them to the far end of the gap. O'Shaugnessy stepped down, holding his hand up for his daughter. She turned and put her arms about O'Connell's neck and kissed him fairly. For all her parched and peeling lips—and his own—it seemed to him as if a rose had pressed there, unfolding its fragrant heart. He watched them for a few seconds, sliding down the loose rocks, reaching a growth of shrub.

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Sheila looked back, waved her hand. He returned the salute and turned back wearily to hold the fort.

SUNSET was flaming through the gorge, out of the Macassar Strait before one of Quong's persistent rushes, flanked by the creeping hillmen on the sides of the cliff; scored their first kill. There came a wild flood of Chinese about the barrier rock. The first killed were used as shields by the next. Boyd fell heavily, a slug through the lungs. Menzies and O'Connell retreated stubbornly before the play of a dozen blades, cutlas and *kris*. Menzies emptied his last clip, hurled the automatic into the face of his nearest opponent and gave way, swinging his clubbed rifle.

The man who, long before, had crept back into cover on the side of the crag, kept there by close-flung bullets, found his chance. His aim from the rest, sighting at Menzies, found its mark and the engineer toppled, drilled through both temples.

O'Connell counted off his shots, one by one, of his own final clip. They slashed at him, slicing his left shoulder and the blood poured down. Life ran from him like water from a broken jar. A shot from the cliff shattered his left knee and brought him down. The pass filled with mist. He had fallen between two rock fragments, facing his foes, his pistol arm free. They backed away from him a little as men might back from a bayed tiger.

A voice rallied him. It was Quong's. The *comprador* came round the rock, pistol in hand.

"Is he dead?" he asked in Chinese.

O'Connell answered him with his last bullet between the eyes.

He had meant it for himself but knew that he could live but a few weakening heart beats. He was drained of blood. But he was content. By this Sheila and her father would be touching safety. And Quong was dead. Cheated the bowstring after all! But the pigeon, the white pigeon, the gold-and-white pigeon, was in free flight.

A whisper in his ear. Hardly audible. Boyd—not quite dead.

The Chinese, staggered at the death of Quong, a little uncertain, a little afraid of these men, held off.

"O'Connell?"

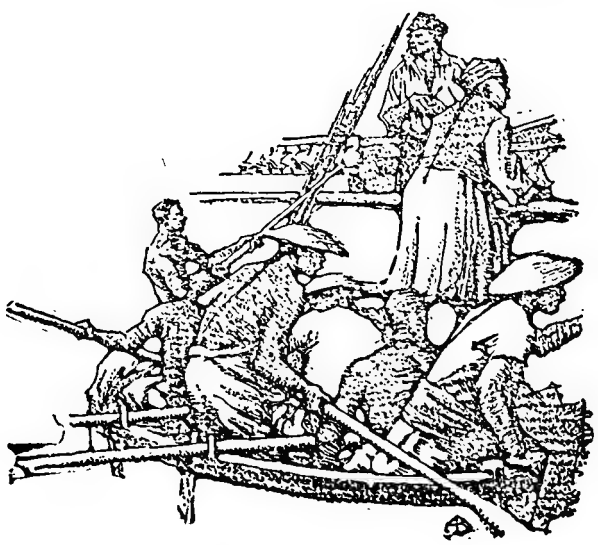
"Boyd? They're safe by now. Not so bad—for flotsam—eh?"

"No, lad. We've bested 'em. Not flotsam."

"What then?"

"God knows, lad. Maybe he'll think it salvage, after all."

A coolie stepped forward with uplifted blade. O'Connell raised his head, a last flare in his eyes. They blurred, glazed and he fell back over Boyd, his outflung hand just touching Menzies' body. Only the broken shells of them were left. Three up there, one down by the lava ridge. All four of their faces wore a smile.



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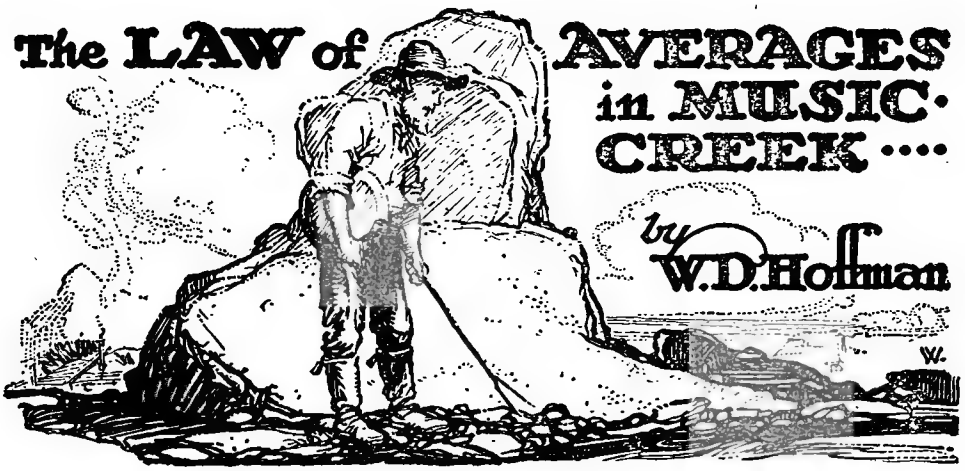
The LAW of AVERAGES in MUSIC CREEK ....

by W. D. Hoffman



IT WAS late afternoon when I got into Music Creek. Deep purple shadows were lining the landscape from sugar-pines and tumble-down cabins in the gulch. A dozen bearded men were coming down the hillside into town.

It was seventy-two years ago that the sailors deserted their ships in San Francisco bay to rush to the gold-fields. Counting back, or, more properly, ahead, I determined that if "Dad" Primrose had been sixteen in '49, he was eighty-eight today. He probably had been more than sixteen, possessing as he did so fresh a memory of the early days, yet he did not look ninety now. Still, one must consider that men like Dad carry their age well in the out-of-the-way mountains of California.

Though none except old Dad could claim to be a Forty-niner, there were a lot of other venerables in Music Creek. It was astonishing to find such specimens of manhood, erect, strapping fellows in the seventies, with long beards and straight noses, descendants, most of them, of the "Pikes," backwoods Missourians who flocked to California across the plains.

Dad looked almost too keen and alert to be one of the fast-vanishing handful of the Argonauts. He was sitting on the edge of the boardwalk when our mules drew up. I had never failed to find him in that same spot, feet propped up against the sycamore, his clay pipe hanging loosely from his toothless mouth. The old twinkle was in the steely gray eyes when he saw me.

If one would lose himself completely—set the hands of the clock back three-quarters of a century—let him go to Music Creek. Here good roads and motorists have not penetrated. Resort hotels are absent and vacationists have not yet found the spot. Any one constituted like myself will get a strange thrill in the very ruin of the place, particularly when Dad Primrose lifts a shriveled but steady finger toward the cabins of the gold seekers now crumbling into decay and makes them respond again with the song and laughter of '49 and '50.

"Over thar the Warner brothers lived afore they tuk out seventy-five thousand dollars and left. And thar," pointing to a roofless ruin, "Lawyer Simon flipped flapjacks and struck it. Over thar where there ain't nothing but a log floor left, is whar the three New Bedford boys slept. They tuk out one hundred thousand dollars in this ravine in three months."

Dad came to his feet slowly when he saw me and extended a hand. He was always glad to see me, though he often appeared puzzled why I should come to Music Creek. Had I told him the truth—merely to lose myself, to bask in his own rich reminiscences of another age—he would have thought me a lunatic, I have no doubt.

"Dad ought to be happy now," confided the muleteer who had ridden in with me. "He can't scare up another listener in this camp for love nor money. You're the only one he can tell 'em to!"

"*The Law of Averages in Music Creek*," *copyright*, 1922, *by W. D. Hoffman.*

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It was Dad who gave me the facts about Dutch Charlie, though it must be admitted they were obtained somewhat piecemeal. In the histories of the period one will find nothing but passing reference to the central character of the tale; nevertheless the events and personalities herein were the most conspicuous of their time, the Fall of 1849, at Music Creek, when there were ten thousand in the camp and environs, when there were stores, theaters, cafés, dance hall, gambling "palaces," and even bull fights on Sundays.

Since Primrose's memory has been put to the test frequently, always squaring with the known history of the region, the facts in the main may be vouched for.

IN THE year of the great rush there arrived a number of Dutch Charlies, those Hollanders who had left their ships in the harbor and hurried to Coloma, Kelsey's, Hangtown and other camps, including Music Creek. Their luck in the diggings was proverbial.

"I never seen the beat the way the Dutch Charlies struck the pay dirt," commented Dad repeatedly during the recital.

In Music Creek there was one Dutch Charlie who was more conspicuous than the rest, noted for his marvelous luck and his quick massing of wealth in the ravine. Here in this camp when one used "Dutch Charlie" in the singular there was no mistaking who was meant.

As events later showed, this Dutchman differed from the others in a number of ways. Most of them were rigorously honest, for one thing. Perhaps our own Charlie's motives were more honest than one would judge.

As to opulence, Dutch Charlie ran perfectly true to form. If there were other affluent Hollanders in camp (and there were), parading on the lone street of a Sunday with displays of nugget jewelry, our own Charlie went them one better, revealing a brace of big gold watches instead of one (his own original idea) and decorated with an immense chain of nuggets that went twice around his neck, crossed ornately over his black velvet vest and hung from his gaudy sash on either side along his trouser-legs to the knees.

As Charlie strolled idly about the town in his new wide, curled-brim hat and shiny Sunday-go-to-meeting boots, his hands thrust carelessly into his pockets, he was a walking advertisement of the fact that Dutchmen were the especial pets of Fortune in the gold camps.

The Hollander had struck it rich from the time his pick and shovel penetrated top soil and reached bedrock on his first claim in the ravine. While others grumbled about miners' law and the fifteen-foot limit fixed to a claim, Charlie said little and dug much. Under the very noses of miners who were sweating to make wages he lit on pay dirt with coarse gold and nuggets running into the sizes of filberts.

"How d'ye do it?" they asked him, dropping their picks long enough to survey the latest strike.

And Charlie didn't have to open his mouth to reply. "Another Dutchman," they answered their own question, in disgust, and resumed their digging amid muttering of complaint and bewildered curiosity.

As Dad Primrose put it, "The Dutchman war a lucky man." He took out a dozen ounces of dust a day (a couple hundred dollars) with no more effort than necessary to shovel the gravel off bedrock, load it into buckets and rock it out at the creek below.

Charlie said extremely little and fraternized less. To those who sought to draw from him any secret signs or omens which might give Hollanders the key to hidden wealth he vouchsafed nothing.

"It beats all, it does," grumbled "Massachusetts" Joe, shoveling out the low-grade with his partner on the claim adjoining. "Them Dutch Charlies swoop down everywhere and pick out slab gold right ag'inst our elbows. You can't tell me they ain't got some way o' knowin'."

"Ill-Omen" Yates snorted—

"Hog luck; that's all."

Yates too was a Dutch youth, whom travel on the seas had polished—but he was not a lucky Dutchman.

As Dad Primrose emphasized, Charlie was not of the fraternizing kind, and in this he differed from the most of his countrymen, who were genial and communicative at least among miners of their own nationality. This Dutch Charlie was cordial with no one; he avoided the people of his own nationality even more than the others. To explain this, Dad revealed some things he learned later, giving a glimpse back into Holland, to the little village of Lemmer, on the Zuider Zee.

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FIFTEEN years had passed since Charlie, a fugitive, had left his native land. When he did so, a foolish youth of eighteen, it was with one thousand dollars of his uncle's hard-earned accumulations of a lifetime. Charlie did not regard it as theft, because when he left he had all the intentions in the world of paying it back, some day, with interest. But it was not an easy thing for a sailor lad to save one thousand dollars when once it had been spent.

The Hollander had remained a fugitive, and he did not want to see much of people hailing from the Zuider Zee. If an acquaintance from his old home town should stumble on him here in the gold-fields there would be no way of his knowing that Dutch Charlie was digging zealously in the hope that after years he would be able to repay the debt many times over, surprizing the little family who had reared him.

Making amends to the full, Charlie knew, was now impossible, for on the sea he had gleaned from a sailor the knowledge that his old uncle had died heartbroken over the loss of his savings and the family home with it. But there was the opportunity for doing something for the widow and the only child.

So Charlie sank his pick deep into the sand and gravel and said little. He bought a cradle and hired a man at eight dollars (one-half ounce of dust) a day to carry the pay dirt in buckets while he rocked it and washed out the gold. The dust he stored in tin-can "banks" and buried the cans under a rotted pine near his cabin.

"There warn't an iron safe in Music Crick in them days," Dad explained.

Charlie's earnings increased as his digging continued. In a few months he had taken out thirty thousand dollars.

Then one day the washings began to show less color. In a week the bedrock dirt wasn't worth handling.

Charlie dismissed the hired man, closed down operations—and said nothing. The creek went dry and others also ceased work, or piled their dirt in heaps to await the fall rains for washing.

The Dutchman took stock of his labor in the diggings. One Sunday evening found him rocking tranquilly in his barrel chair before his cabin fire, puffing contentedly at his pipe. The flames from the pine-log blaze lit up a ruddy, chubby face in which were set a pair of mild blue eyes, kindly and engaging. A wonted expression of trouble in the creased forehead faded away and a smile broke from the generous lips. Charlie was dreaming and through the red embers he was living again in the vine-covered cottage on the Zuider Zee.

Through the years his vision carried him. The expression of trouble returned. He saw the old home sold and Uncle Jake's despair, his illness, and the funeral procession in the village. The widow who had been the only mother he ever had he saw turned out with her little boy, penniless, in poverty, left to the mercy of neighbors to work in drudgery, long hours, to raise the boy. Tears came into the eyes of the Hollander for the first time since he sailed from home fifteen years before.

When Charlie rolled up in his blankets that night the smile returned to his lips. In the morning he would say farewell to Music Creek, with thirty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust, which he would take personally back to Holland and deliver in full to mother and son. The son must be a grown man now, just starting out in life, and Charlie was happy at the thought of what the fortune would mean to him.

Morning found the Hollander, with pick and shovel, on the way to the rotted log. Always he had been in the habit of looking back when he visited the cache to see that his hiding-place was not observed. This morning he took no precautions, for he was going to dig up the cans and carry them in a sack to the express office for shipment to San Francisco while he took the same stage.

"He war the wildest-eyed Dutchman you ever seen when he dug down into the ground an' seen that his gold cans was all gone!" declared Dad Primrose.

Stunned, Charlie made his way back to the cabin. It was a staggering blow and for long hours he sat unmoving, his eyes gazing pale and far-away into the dead ashes of the hearth.

His youthful crime was burning into his conscience a thousand times worse than it had ever done before. The promise of restitution stripped from him, he was in despair. His claim in the ravine, pinched out, was worthless. He could not now sail with the fortune he had planned to give.

"Fer a little time it looked like Dutch Charlie war the onluckiest man in Music Crick, ruther than th' luckiest," Dad Primrose said. "But the Dutchman war lucky

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in one way—nobudy knowed his claim pinched out and nobudy knowed his dust war stolen. Mum war his word, an' other folks would do mighty well to cotton to his example."

Music Creek, ignorant of developments, continued to look on the Hollander with envious eyes. The thirty thousand dollars he had taken out in so short a time had made him known from one end of the diggings to the other as the luckiest of all the Dutch Charlies. But now, save for the nugget chain, he was stripped— the owner of only a little unwashed low-grade dirt on a pinched-out claim. Still, he had two things left—his reputation, and credit.

To quote Dad Primrose again:

"Charlie war not a dumb Dutchman. In the fifteen years he sailed the main he learned a heap."

So it was that to all hints, direct and indirect, that the Hollander reveal the secret of finding pay dirt he was unresponsive.

The Forty-niners were a superstitious lot, Dad confessed, believing much in signs and omens, and the most trivial happening often caused a stampede. Wise ones there were who said that "Gold is where you find it." But the bulk of the miners were on the constant hunt for something more specific.

And Charlie held his peace, denying nothing, asserting nothing.

But there is an exception to every rule, and one day Charlie was moved in pity to lend a word of advice to a little Scotch lad of seventeen who had come all the way from the Clyde to seek his fortune, working for months without uncovering a speck of color.

"Charlie warn't all bad," Dad said at this point, "an' his heart war moved by the hard luck o' the pore Scotch lad, a pet o' the miners o' Music Crick."

Thus it happened that the Dutchman went with the lad one morning and pointed out a likely spot in the ravine where he advised the boy to pick out a claim and dig.

Now there were things about California gold that Charlie did not know, but some things he did know—information he had picked up from other gold ports of the world, and much from his own experiences in Music Creek. For one thing, he knew that the best placers were in the gravel in the center of the bed of a ravine. There was gold on the sides, to be sure, fine gold—too fine. The coarse, heavy gold, carrying nuggets, was always washed to the center by the action of flowing water.

Another bit of information he had picked up: Glaciers had once covered part of California; therefore one is often fooled looking for gold in the deep holes in streams, because while gold naturally sinks to the deep holes, the glaciers had often scooped it out. Then the melting ice had left its gold in the shallows. This explained why the unknowing ones, prospecting flowing creeks and ravines that had for ages been dry, so frequently passed over the best placers.

So Charlie, anxious to lend a hand to the camp mascot, pointed out a promising claim for the boy.

The youngster went to work with a vim, having heard enough tales of the luck and wizardry of Dutch Charlie to inspire confidence.

"An'—" to use the words of Dad—"the lad struck it rich. He tuk out pan after pan o' heavy pay sand, washed enough by hand to see he war rich, an' piled up the rest o' the gravel to wait fer the rains."

The strike was as much of a surprize to Charlie as to the camp as a whole. But that didn't prevent the news spreading like wildfire. The Dutchman had picked out the boy's claim. Again the "Dutch Charlie legend" had the camp by the ears.

"Dang me," emitted Massachusetts Joe, "you can't tell me they ain't got some way o' knowin'."

"Know the ——!" growled Ill-Omen Yates. "Pure hog luck."

But he wasn't so sure it was hog luck as he pretended to think.

Dutch Charlie again lapsed into silence. Dissatisfied prospectors sought him out for advice and even offered him fees for information. But Charlie kept his own counsel. Nevertheless he did a lot of thinking.

Charlie let it be known that he was going to take a little rest for a few months, saying nothing about his claim pinching out. He wasn't yet through with Music Creek, nor was he ready to sail for the Zuider Zee.

Whereas he had in the past been appearing on the streets on Sundays in black boots, handsome vest and sash, gold-laden, he now became a familiar sight in the habiliments of opulence on week days also. With the heavy nugget chain to set off his store clothes he radiated prosperity in his methodical parade about town.

The Dutchman's reserve drew out more

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than ever the eager interviewers who wanted the gold secret. And although he turned a deaf ear he always looked mysteriously wise.

HAVING excellent credit, Charlie opened a gambling saloon. The "Belle Sadie" he called it. "Charlie knows where the gold is," they said. "An' he sartinly did," commented Dad Primrose.

Probably because the Dutchman was a lucky man, the house drew big. Success and good fortune always attract more good fortune. This was the magnet that swelled the patronage. Charlie's heart warmed, and he talked some. But not on the subject nearest the miners' hearts. Was it a charm, a scientific mystery, or mere good luck that told the Dutchman where the gold-bearing ground lay?

As Dad Primrose explained, superstitions of gold miners were to be expected because nowhere else did equal labor and intelligence yield so unequal a return as in the placer country. Runaway slaves were apt to strike it rich alongside lawyers and doctors who had deserted their offices to use the pick and pan.

All believers in signs and omens thought Charlie possessed some charm. The hard-headed who scoffed at such things concluded that the Dutchman knew something they had not found out.

The Hollander by his silence encouraged both classes. They offered him dust and money—fifty dollars, one hundred dollars, two hundred dollars, and a royalty, to pick a winning prospect. But Charlie was a cautious man, and waited.

Meanwhile he accumulated the contents of many a man's poke via the gaming tables.

One day there came into the Belle Sadie a massive, raw-boned gold hunter, recently from Pike county, Missouri. The "Pike" told a tale of unusual hard luck. Charlie seemed impressed. Three claims he had taken up and worked without result. Wouldn't the Dutchman tell him whether his new claim was worth the labor to dig down to bedrock?

Charlie yielded. That night he went out into the moonlight with a forked stick of hazel for a divining rod and maneuvered over the old man's diggings. He told him there wasn't wages in the place.

Pike was for quitting the claim right there and hunting another when Ill-Omen Yates came by. Yates laughed at the story the Pike told him.

"Don't put no stock in Dutch Charlie," he said. "Gold is where you find it."

The Pike decided to sink one hole to bedrock and test out the Dutchman's prediction. When the Missourian got through digging he found Dutch Charlie was right. There was scarcely a trace of color in twenty pans.

Next day there was much talk about the incident. The Dutchman had truly had unerring judgment again. Miners sought the Belle Sadie and held whispered conversations with Charlie.

Naturally, Charlie explained, he was not going out to lay his finger on the choice gold ground for every Tom and Harry who came to camp. He expected to go to digging himself again, as soon as the rains set in.

At least a score sought to work with him on a partnership basis, Charlie selecting the claim, the partners doing the work and dividing the proceeds.

And just to show his good faith ("It's a shyster's game when they talk good faith—watch out!" to quote Dad Primose) the Hollander began to yield occasionally to importunings and to donate his services *free* to pass on some fellow's claim.

Each time he employed the divining rod, at night, ostensibly in secret. Each time he informed his clients that the ground wasn't anything to go crazy about.

One might have thought from his prognostications that good claims were few in Music Creek.

And, to quote Dad Primrose again, "Dagged if it wasn't astonishin' to the camp how offen the Dutchman hit the nail on the head."

So far so good. As the gambling business grew, so the new enterprise of Dutch Charlie was being put on a footing. He made it a point to see that his divining rod secret was observed.

Instead of being angry, he was delighted when he saw figures skulking about behind the brush in the moonlight watching him. His sorcery was a success—for the end he had in view. Needless to say, of all the miners in camp who did not believe in divining-rods, the Dutchman was the chief.

Others began to use the hazel stick. It didn't take long for most of the camp to hear the whispers about Charlie's secret.

"You can try it," the Hollander told

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them. "It won't do you any good. Do you know how to *use* the stick in the starlight? Know your lucky planet, do you? Maybe you don't know the combination!"

They had absolutely no luck with the divining rod, as Charlie had forecast. One reason was that they were trying to find gold. The Dutchman was using it to find where gold was *not*.

And Ill-Omen Yates, loudly contemptuous at all superstitious "didoes," as he called them, sneaked out at night and tried the hazel stick. It was a fraud, as he knew it would be.

The gambler, for such the Hollander became in more senses than one, found his negative forecasts of value for his own purposes. But it could not go on this way forever. One of these days some one would insist that Charlie do more than point out where gold was not.

It was Ill-Omen Yates who forced matters to a showdown.

The Dutchman was passing the horse-trough below the Belle Sadie when a group hailed him. They wanted to be shown some ground that would "pungle." Ill-Omen suppressed a growing dislike for the gambler enough to hurl a challenge at him.

"You're a fraud," he charged. "Show me a claim that'll pungle, and we'll pay you honest-to-goodness dust. We'll work the diggings and give you half."

"Pungle," Dad Primrose explained, was the miner's word for uncovering a heavy yield of coarse gold.

Charlie only smiled, and passed on his way, hands in pockets, fondling the long heavy nugget chain. But nobody knew better than the Dutchman that he must gamble now. His whole plan would depend upon it.

Although Charlie had as much love for Ill-Omen Yates as for a Digger Indian, he would not let that circumstance interfere with business. He was game.

The Dutchman, being both long-sighted and cautious, had prepared for such a test. A portion of the dust he took in over the Belle Sadie tables he had carefully laid away for a rainy day. This gambling "money" he put into his new iron safe, the first to arrive in Music Creek. A portion of this dust he had determined to use for "salting" the claim he had selected for Ill-Omen.

Charlie went up the ravine Sunday night and used his divining rod.

Monday morning he went down the gulch looking for Ill-Omen Yates. The thought of sneaking real gold into the pockets of Yates this way caused the Hollander to groan inwardly. But it had to be done. Charlie decided he would make it up some day.

He beckoned to Yates and his friends to follow him up the ravine. There he pointed out the fifteen-foot area where he said gold would "pungle."

Ill-Omen, though he grunted in ridicule at Charlie's calm, confident prophecy, made the dirt fly for the special purpose of "showing the Dutchman up."

A day's feverish digging brought Ill-Omen to bedrock, as the Dutchman had figured it would. By evening Yates had got into the gravel and panned a sample or two. There was no great promise in these pans and Ill-Omen wanted to shout with delight at Charlie's failure as a prophet.

It was during the black hours after midnight that Charlie slipped out to the ravine and planted a liberal quantity of dust in the gravel at the bottom of the hole.

Before nine the next morning Yates hit into the high-grade pay dirt carrying dust, grains and nuggets. Ill-Omen could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Dagged if he warn't mad as a hornet," said Dad Primose. "Got drunk in pure disgust over findin' gold whar Charlie said it 'ud be."

Charlie was dumfounded. He knew he had salted only a quantity of fine dust. Ill-Omen was taking out coarse gold, running into fair-sized nuggets.

Making many sample tests of the claim to be sure, Yates found that he had truly struck it rich. He piled the remaining dirt to await the fall rains, when he would clean up everything in sight with the cradles. Sour as he was, Ill-Omen admitted grudgingly that the Dutchman was a wizard. He vented his feelings somewhat by naming the place the Jackass claim.

I asked Dad Primrose how Dutch Charlie managed to pick this winning claim.

"Hog luck an' the law o' averages," he explained briefly. "Tuk a chanct an' done it, that's all. He war a lucky un."

"Why didn't he pick a claim for himself, since his own had pinched out?"

"Might uv. But that would be givin' th' hint that his own reg'lar claim warn't much account. He needed the repytation from this claim."

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After that there were no doubters in Music Creek—not even Ill-Omen Yates.

In fairness to Charlie it can be said that he did not make claims of infallibility. He merely admitted that he had a way of finding gold ninety-nine per cent. of the time! In making this claim good he depended upon the aforementioned law of averages, the divining rod, luck and—judicious rebating of part of the dust by salting.

He was in no hurry, but let them come to him with offers. Fees, small at first, were tendered—and refused. Then one day an Illinois doctor came into the Belle Sadie and laid down five hundred dollars.

"That goes if I strike it or not. If I do, I'll make it one thousand dollars."

Charlie accepted the fee, reluctantly—seemingly. But the Dutchman insisted on secrecy. It was a special favor. The doctor must tell no one, because Charlie would be pestered with so many people that it would interfere with business at the Belle Sadie.

After the Hollander got through, the doctor went to work, piled out the gravel, tried a few pans of it, was delighted, and continued to shovel dirt in preparation for washing when the creek ran again. The doctor was quick to swell the fee to one thousand dollars.

He had no way of knowing that exactly half of the five-hundred-dollar fee had been salted back in the sample dirt.

Had Charlie asked the doctor to tell everybody what a good locater he was, little would have been said about it. But since he demanded secrecy, the effect was as he expected—everybody in Music Creek heard about it with all details immediately.

A dozen men slipped around to the Belle Sadie within the next twenty-four hours and plunked down the dust for the five-hundred-dollar fee.

Always demurring, Charlie accepted the little buckskin bags of dust. Invariably he performed his nightly necromancy with the divining rod, taking care now that no one was watching close enough to see much. As his clients progressed with the digging on the new locations, Charlie, under cover of the hazel-stick manipulations, sprinkled the proper percentage of dust in the gravel.

Circumstances were favorable to Charlie. Even Mother Nature conspired in his behalf with the dry creek bed, so that the miners panned nothing but samples. By the time the diggings were washed out in the Fall with the cradles Charlie might be back on the Zuider Zee making amends for the swindle of his youth.

Some there were whose resources were strained to pay the initial five hundred dollars, who when they "struck it" asked credit on the remaining five hundred dollars, and Charlie was always liberal. Others borrowed the full fee, finding no difficulty raising it on "pay dirt" that was awaiting the rains.

Dutch Charlie became a gold camp hero. Those going out of the ravine carried his fame to other diggings. Those coming in had already heard of the wizard of Music Creek. There were no scoffers. Even Ill-Omen Yates gradually became a vehement advocate of the Dutchman's magic, pointing to the Jackass claim.

IN LESS than six months after Charlie had gone broke on a defunct claim and a stolen cache of dust, he had retrieved most of what he had lost. The divining rod and the games in the Belle Sadie were yielding returns like his first rich diggings.

Long-sighted about everything, Charlie had set about making the Belle Sadie a trustworthy place. From the start he insisted on such rigid fair-dealing that the gambling house came dangerously near being unpopular. But the patronage grew in spite of the Belle Sadie's low percentage, and the proprietor's foresight was rewarded.

When the harvest became ripe he proceeded to reap it. Nothing was extremely crude. Music Creek had a reputation for summary treatment of crooked gamblers. So the Dutchman mixed his games with finesse.

At the bar one pinch of gold dust bought a drink, the price being the amount that the bartender could take out of a man's poke between his thumb and forefinger. When "Big Wing" Murphy, famed for an enormous thumb that would nigh double receipts behind the bar, offered Charlie his services the Dutchman refused. His ways of extracting dust were less visible than that proposed by Murphy. But they were none the less certain.

"Charlie war a rascal, but I reckon he oughtn'ta be jedged too severe, seein' as he had his eye on helpin' out his folks back in

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th' old kentry," philosophized Dad Primrose.

Things stood this way when one afternoon Ill-Omen Yates drifted into the Belle Sadie. He sought out the proprietor to discuss a matter of business, as he put it, ordered drinks for the house and in the presence of everybody apologized to Dutch Charlie for ugly words in the past, at the same time acclaiming the Hollander as the discoverer of the rich Jackass diggings. Yates, it was plain to see, had been tossing off some strong liquor elsewhere that morning. He produced a fat poke of dust and after several rounds of drinks forgot all about the business in hand and took a seat at one of the tables.

Dutch Charlie sat down to deal the three-card monte himself.

"I want to do it for my friend, Mister Yates," explained the gambler.

Ill-Omen drew forth his dust recklessly, bet on a card and threw it down. He won—that is, he would have won if Charlie had not changed the court card.

Yates was feeling too good to care one way or another. After leaning over to caress the Dutchman he pulled out another poke, holding about eight hundred dollars, and bet it all on a card. This time he lost fairly enough.

When he left the Belle Sadie late that night he not only took none of the dust he had brought, but left in the hands of Dutch Charlie a bill of sale for the Jackass property in full.

If the gambler had any qualms of conscience over the night's work he overcame them with the thought—

"Won't Aunt Hulda be surprized when I walk in with my pile and hand it over to her?"

This same comforting thought had stood him in good stead whenever he hesitated about taking his "location fee" from victims who could ill afford to pay.

"They're here in the gold-fields and can make it up. Back on the Zuider Zee there is no chance for Hulda and the boy to find the gold they need," Charlie argued.

When Ill-Omen woke up in the morning to find his pokes skimmed of the last fleck of color his feelings were hurt. When he learned that he had signed over the Jackass claim to the Dutchman he began to rave. All the old hatred of the Hollander returned a thousand fold. He stuck his bowie knife in his belt and started back for the Belle Sadie.

"Again the Dutchman war a lucky man," in the words of Dad Primrose.

Only the massive nuggets in the copper-wire chain parried the blow that would have left the gambler free from all troublesome recollections of the Zuider Zee.

After this fiasco Ill-Omen decided to bide his time for revenge, feeling that it was bound to come. He was sure now that the Dutchman was a swindler; that he had picked even the Jackass purely by accident. No chain is stronger than its weakest link; no game safer than its weakest trick. Yates would lie in wait for that trick.

In the meantime Charlie continued to do business. Even an occasional Dutch Charlie came to the Belle Sadie for advice—sailormen who had recently arrived in camp. It delighted the gambler to "hook" all such, either in locating goldbearing ground or at the games. The Dutchman's dislike for his countrymen was far from mitigated by the arrival of more of them, any one of whom might have seen him back in Lemmer and known his history.

One of these newcomers, a bright-eyed, pink-cheeked youth, had brought with him almost to a dollar the five hundred dollar fee to employ the divining rod.

Hans explained to Charlie that the five hundred dollars was all he had; that he had worked six months in San Francisco saving it before coming to the goldfields. The gambler listened with interest.

Charlie knew it was getting near the time of year for the rains again, when cradles and long-toms would be put into commission washing out the dirt on a score of "salted" claims. It was almost time for him to be getting together the dust he had appropriated, sell out the Belle Sadie and start for Holland.

He took Hans' five hundred dollars with the thought that the money would reach the old country more quickly in his hands than in those of the boy—and ultimately reach better hands.

Partly because he knew the youngster would not have the additional five hundred dollars to give him if he "struck it," and partly because he was getting ready to close operations, Charlie satisfied himself by scattering a bare two ounces, worth under thirty-five dollars, on the claim he selected for Hans. Subtracted from the five hundred dollars, that left four hundred and

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sixty-five dollars more for Aunt Hulda on the Zuider Zee. It was all Charlie needed to make the thirty thousand dollars on which he had set his heart.

The pink-cheeked Hans, possessed of the enthusiasm of youth, was not content to make a test and pile up the remainder of the pay dirt. He packed all the bedrock gravel two miles to the springs, got out the two ounces that Charlie had put in—minus waste—then found absolutely nothing.

By the time Hans had paid his board bill and supply account he was penniless. When he confided his plight to Charlie, the Dutchman smiled, and said he was sorry.

Whether the gambler suspected it or not, Hans had something more on his mind than the worthless claim in Music Creek. Casually he let something drop about Lemmer, on the Zuider Zee.

Charlie was sitting comfortably in a corner of the big room, eyes commanding the gaming tables and the bar, when he heard the lad mention Lemmer. He took his pipe from his mouth and tipped the chair forward. Slowly he tipped it back again, trying to appear unconcerned. But he was stirred more than he had been when he struck pay dirt nine months before.

Foolish of him, he reflected, masking his inward agitation. The boy was a child at the time Charlie had left Lemmer. There was no way for him to know.

Then Hans, whether wittingly or not, struck a blow that penetrated deep into the gambler's reassuring brain.

"You know, Charlie," he said, "I have somewhere in the gold-fields a cousin—a very rich cousin—they tell me. The news of his wealth traveled to me in far-away Lemmer. I wonder if you know him—Karl Rauscher, his name. But I hardly think he can be found easily, because over here the real names of our countrymen are soon forgotten. We are all ignorant Dutch Charlies—Dutch Charlie this and Dutch Charlie that."

If the youth knew what he was doing he must have been disappointed at watching the gambler's face. Charlie sat motionless, silent, apparently lacking interest. Hans could not peer under the blank mask of the Dutchman's face, or he might have known.

Charlie's long training in the ways of the world and the gaming tables stood him in good stead now. The storm in his breast raged terribly under that blank countenance. His mind's eye was picturing again how he had robbed this boy when a baby. All his work in the gold-fields had been done to recompense this same lad and his mother. And he had just robbed him anew, taking his last penny in a foreign land in a divining-rod confidence game!

Surely the luck of Dutch Charlie must have deserted him to play such a trick as this on him!

Gradually, with seeming disinterestedness, the gambler drew from Hans something about the family, about the old home at Lemmer. Only a year previously the mother had died, explained Hans, after struggling with direst poverty to bring up the boy since the renegade nephew ran away with the father's savings. Since then they had been homeless and moved to the country out of Lemmer, the mother occasionally hiring out to work in the fields and the boy working at her side. Thus they had managed to live, Hans said, until, broken prematurely in health, the mother followed the father, all on account of the cruel, faithless relative who had robbed them.

Such was the story Hans told, simply, without bitterness. Now he would like to find that cousin of his, reputed to be rich in the goldfields. He never could repay the injury he had done, of course, but Hans would like to meet him face to face and exact an accounting.

The Dutchman laid his pipe on the table and rose. He was sorry he could not help the boy locate his cousin, he said. If he should ever run into such a man as Karl Rauscher he would be glad to acquaint him of the fact.

The gambler paraded up and down the narrow street of the gulch many times that evening. All his plans were destroyed now—just on the eve of realization, as they had been when the gold was stolen from under the log. Only it was worse now. There was nothing to look forward to, no great day of triumph and restitution when he would carry the fortune across the sea for the widow and her boy. The last vestige of the little family was the boy Hans here in Music Creek.

The troubled look came again into the blue eyes of the Hollander and deepened into despair. Never could he tell this boy of his identity, of his long dream that inspired him to amass much gold—and, failing, to cheat and rob to get the conscience

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money. Hans would not have believed him. The boy probably would try to kill him, a fate that he deserved. Hans was seeking an accounting.

And yet, as Dad Primrose emphasized, "The Dutchman was a lucky man."

In the midst of his despair he congratulated himself that Hans had no way of knowing his identity. Years gone by he had changed his name and his bearded face altered him since he left Lemmer a youth of eighteen. No one else had reached the goldfields from Lemmer.

Quick decisions had long been the rule with the gambler; the greater the crisis, the quicker the decision. So it was that before the evening was half gone he had arrived at a plan.

As Dutch Charlie turned at the end of the dirt street he did not see the man hiding in the shadows of the blacksmith shop. He would have been uneasy had he known that Ill-Omen Yates was lurking so near, for Yates also had a wrong to redress. But Ill-Omen made no move. The gambler passed the corner in safety. Yates was not yet ready for the accounting.

Dutch Charlie went back to the Belle Sadie, now buzzing with the heavy nightly patronage of the eleventh hour. He did not sit in tonight at any of the monte tables. Instead he went to his room above the gambling hall, gathered together from his iron safe much gold-dust and two buckskin bags of nuggets, and waited. For the first time since he had heard the name Lemmer mentioned in the early evening he was becoming tranquil now. He puffed at his long-stemmed pipe, watched the smoke clouds ascend to the ceiling, and smiled.

ONE o'clock came, two o'clock, then three. At last the lights went out in the hall below. The Dutchman gathered together the gold and quietly descended the stairs. Into the gambling-room he went and to the strong-box on the bar. When he left the building soon after, he had with him thirty thousand dollars in gold, his entire fortune except the building over his head. It was gold that represented not only the ten thousand dollars he had taken in sharp practise at crooked games, the few thousand in raw nuggets he had picked from the Jackass diggings that he stole from Ill-Omen Yates, but the fifteen thousand dollars he had managed to amass through other dubious enterprises, including the divining-rod swindle. It included the five hundred dollars minus thirty-five dollars that Hans had paid him for the worthless prospect.

Not least in the mass of gold was the heavy chain of nuggests. He had removed the copper wire upon which they had been strung and hammered them to hide the little holes.

Dutch Charlie spent the balance of the night in the dark ravine at the diggings of the boy Hans. Shovel and pick he plied at the hole near bedrock and at the gravel and sand which Hans had dug out, tested and found wanting. Dust he sifted and mixed judiciously; the nuggets he buried in the virgin ground, planting some of them with his fingers by candle-light. Yet he knew his care was hardly necessary, for Hans, of all the camp greenhorns, would not know the claim had been salted.

When before daylight the gambler slipped down the ravine he felt better than he had felt for fifteen years. Luckily for his peace of mind he had not seen Ill-Omen Yates hurry by him in the dim light in the gulch.

At last he was repaying—as far as humanly possible. All the years of double-dealing and dishonesty seemed to melt away into nothingness in the exhilaration of the work done this night. To purchase a perfect balm for conscience—Charlie had the price. In many ways the Dutchman was a lucky man.

The gambler climbed the stairs to his room as the sun streamed in, and slept a sweeter sleep than he had slept for years. It was after noon when he awoke. Now for the big moment—the time to steer Hans over to the gravel bed to try again with the pan.

There would be no way that Hans could know. Dutch Charlie could atone without facing the dreaded accounting. He could dodge disgrace as he had dodged it on the seven seas. When he saw Hans happy he would drift on to another camp, and maybe try fortune again. How lucky!

"Hans," he said to the boy that afternoon, "I just happened to pass that claim of yours and was looking over some of the ground. I thought I saw some very good color there. I think you ought to give it another try."

"Oh," said Hans, "I sold that claim this morning for five hundred dollars to Ill-Omen Yates and considered myself lucky

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in getting back the money I paid you to locate it."

Dutch Charlie turned about and silently walked down the street into the Belle Sadie. Up the stairs he climbed again.

WHEN his monte dealers rushed up to investigate the pistol shot they found the Dutchman lifeless on the bed.

Music Creek was astounded on learning that Dutch Charlie left no property other than the gambling house. Ill-Omen Yates had been early on the scene, making complete examination to protect himself in the matter of the Jackass claim. While looking through the dead man's papers he ran across a note that had been thrust into his trousers pocket.

To Whom It May Concern:

The Dutch Charlie you all knew was a fraud. They called me the lucky Dutchman, the wizard of Music Creek. Instead, I was the unluckiest of men. I ran away a thief from Holland fifteen years ago. I struck it rich, and then practised fraud to swell my pile so I could pay back, and undo some of the wrong I had done. Little Hans is the son of the uncle I robbed. His father and mother both died from the results of my crime. So without telling him who I was I salted all my gold in his claim. When I found he had sold the claim to my worst enemy I couldn't stand it. So I am taking my life.

DUTCH CHARLIE.

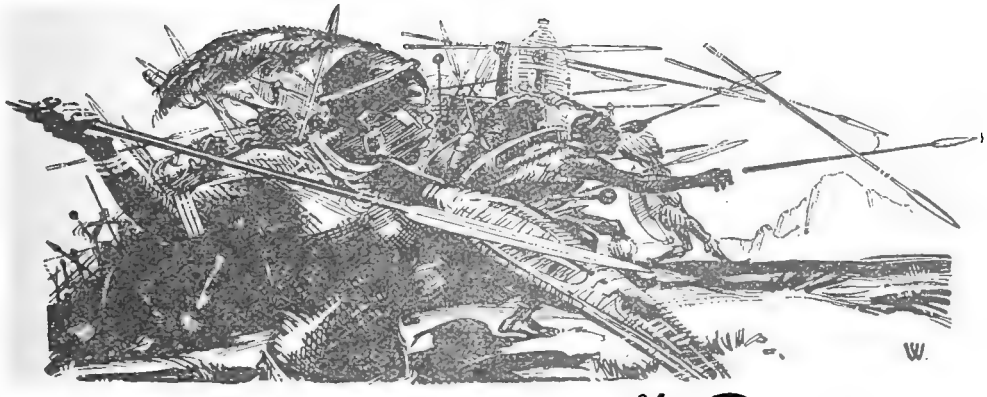
Ill-Omen Yates read the note thoughtfully. Then he left the Belle Sadie and looked up little Hans.

"So that is the game you have been playing," he said, facing the lad. "Look at me carefully, and see if you don't remember my face, without the beard. You must have a good memory for names and places to string Dutch Charlie Rauscher like that. When I told you my story in Sydney I did not think you would try to palm yourself off for me—and me right here in the goldfields all the time. I am in mind to horsewhip you for that lie about mother dying. I advise you to clear out of Music Creek before night."

Hans hunted other diggings forthwith.

Charlie's thirty thousand dollars, including the nuggets from the heavy chain, went back to the Zuider Zee.

"After all," Dad Primrose mused, as twilight settled over the ruined cabins in the ravine, "the Dutchman war a lucky man."



THE CHARM

by L. Patrick Greene

Author of "The Little Thing," "Tools," etc.

THE journalist was not altogether popular at the club. In his presence, men, even garrulous men like "Talky" Taylor, closed up tighter than an oyster; and that was unfortunate, for he had an "insatiable curiosity," indeed he reminded one of nothing so much as a human, rather attenuated, question mark. He had come to Africa, to Rhodesia, shortly after the death of the great empire builder—John Cecil Rhodes—representing a powerful news syndicate, in order to "expose" its government by the Chartered Company, and, though

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Rhodesians are notoriously opposed to outside interference with their affairs, the order had gone forth that he was to be treated with every courtesy.

There was muttered and profane objections to the order—but it was an *order*, and the journalist was given the freedom of the country; he was made an honorary member of The Club at Bulawayo, Rhodesia's most flourishing township.

It is doubtful if at any time since its inception had the club been so deserted. Members, after one experience with the journalist, vowed not to enter the club again until the "pest" had left. His presence worked no hardship on the married members, but for the others, especially those in residence, most of them civil service men, there was no way out. The fact that the club was the coolest place in town; that the imported American "bar-keep" was a cock-tail mixer of international repute, was not sufficient compensation for being forced to listen to the journalist's barrage of questions.

"I wish," said the journalist, peering short-sightedly through his tortoise-shell rimmed glasses at a lieutenant of the B. S. A. P., "I could get some information regarding the last native uprising. Could you——"

"It was purely a local affair," the lieutenant interposed hastily with a groan, "and I've already told you all I know."

"You didn't let me finish my question," the journalist replied coldly. "I was about to ask if you knew of any one in the town who took part in the rebellion—a man who fought in the ranks. You see I've already heard the official story and I thought perhaps——"

"I know just the man you want to see. Don't understand why you haven't been told of him sooner. You know the Royal Hotel?"

"It's the tin shack opposite the statue?"

"That's it. Well, you go there and talk to Jock Thompson—he runs the place, you know. Jock ought to be able to tell you a lot. He was promoted to sergeant and specially mentioned in despatches for something or other. He——"

But the journalist had already departed and the lieutenant leaned back in the wicker chair with a sigh of content; a broad grin spread over his tanned face. Life held some compensations, after all!

JOCK THOMPSON, the journalist discovered, was a big, raw-boned man, slow of speech and movement.

"You wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes, indeed. Can't we sit down? I should like to ask you about the last rebellion. I'm writing a series of articles for the *London News Syndicate*, you know."

Thompson's eyes narrowed as he looked at the journalist with disfavor.

"Oh! So you're *that* fellow, are you?"

The journalist spread his hands deprecatingly.

"Oh come, not quite as bad as that, Jock."

"Name's Thompson."

"Mr. Thompson, of course," the other amended. "But don't you think the people at home ought to know the true state of affairs out here? And that's all I'm telling them."

Thompson grunted.

"And I think they ought to know about the rebellion. The Government has a way, you know, of keeping us in the dark about such things. Won't you tell me what you know?"

"Have you seen the official report?"

"Yes; but——"

"That's all I know."

There was a note of finality in Thompson's voice which rather disconcerted the journalist.

"At least tell me," he said hastily—Thompson was about to move away—"why you were mentioned in the despatches. You were, weren't you?"

Thompson nodded.

"They might as well have given me a packet of cigarets for all the good it did me."

"But think of the honor, Mr. Thompson! And weren't you promoted to a sergeant?"

"Yes, that's so. That was something like; I get a sergeant's pension you see."

"Won't you tell me what it was all for? I'd like to write it up in my letter home this week."

"Well, it was this way," Thompson said slowly, and speaking with great hesitation. "The colonel, my colonel, had a ring he thought a great deal of. Thought more of that ring, the colonel did, than he did of his right hand. Just about the time the rebellion broke out he lost it, or it was stolen maybe, and the colonel was howling mad. He offered a big reward for the return of the

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ring—no questions asked—and I won it."

"You what?"

"Why I found the ring and got the reward."

"Yes, I see—go on."

"That's all there is to it."

The journalist looked at Thompson sharply. He suspected that he was having "his leg pulled," but Thompson's air, rather sheepish and self-conscious, was evidently that of a man telling a truth of which he was a little ashamed.

"Do you mean to say that you were mentioned in despatches and retired on a sergeant's pay just because you found the colonel's ring?"

Thompson nodded.

"Just that. You see it was a very valuable ring."

A thirsty customer entered and Thompson turned away to serve him.

"Sorry I can't tell you any more," Thompson shouted as the journalist, boiling with indignation at what he termed "a gross abuse of the reward system," hurried from the bar on his way back to the club.

"HULLO!" the lieutenant greeted him gaily. "Back so soon? Did you get Jock's story?"

"Enough to confirm the opinion I've held right along—that this colony is run for, and by, a favored few."

"What exactly do you mean?" the lieutenant asked wonderingly.

"You know the reason why Thompson was mentioned in despatches and retired on a sergeant's pay?"

"Yes."

"And because he found the colonel's ring? Is that it?"

"Er—yes—in a way. But——"

"Oh, I don't want to hear any more. It's no use trying to explain; a thing like that can't be explained."

With righteous indignation showing in every line of his figure, the journalist marched off and a moment later the door of the library shut behind him with a bang.

The lieutenant gazed blankly after him then burst into laughter.

"What's the joke?"

The lieutenant sprang to his feet as the squat ungainly figure of Major Honey came toward him.

"Sit down, lieutenant, sit down," the other continued. "We're off duty, you know. Now tell me the joke. I need to laugh at something."

"You'll laugh at this, sir. It's really too funny. The Pest was bothering me—you know how he is?"

The major nodded sympathetically.

"And I sent him down to the Royal to get Jock Thompson's story."

The major grinned in anticipation.

"He's just returned from interviewing old Jock, and he's in there now—" the lieutenant nodded in the direction of the library—"engaged in composing a letter which will, he thinks, prove his contention that this country is run for, and by, a favored few."

"What did Jock tell him?"

"More than I expected. He told him why he was promoted and mentioned in despatches."

"You mean Jock told him the whole story?"

The lieutenant wiped his eyes and looked at the major reproachfully:

"You're doing Jock an injustice, sir. He only said that the colonel had lost a ring and he found it. Just that and no more. But it was enough to set the Pest scribbling as hard as he can. For once he didn't want to hear any more. I can hardly wait until he's ready to read it to us—he always does read his stuff to us, you know, before he mails it."

This time the major's deep laugh harmonized with the lieutenant's.

"But it's too bad," he said, sobering quickly, "that we can't let him go through with it; I mean let him send off his diatribe. And we can't you know. Once that letter was published we'd have the deuce and all of a time explaining."

"At least we can let him read the stuff to us, can't we, major? My word, how the fellows will howl. It'll be a regular rag."

The major shook his head.

"No. I don't think we can do that either. He's our guest, you know, and apart from his confounded 'brain picking' he's not at all a bad sort."

"There are times when he's quite human," agreed the lieutenant. "But how are you going to switch him off that yarn? Tell him the real story? Shall I get Jock up here?"

"We'll tell him the real story, of course, but I don't think Jock's the man to tell it; he's too bloomin' modest. You can tell him what you know and——"

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"Ah! I have it. Who is there among the native police, here in town, who fought against us during that outbreak?"

"There's Guffa, major. He's the son of the Chief of the Fort Tuli District."

"Splendid! He's the very man. We'll get him to tell his side of the story."

The major called one of the club's native servants and sent him with a message to the officer in charge of the Native Police.

"Yes," he continued, after the native had departed on his mission, "I think that'll do the trick. Between us we ought to be able to spin a fairly well-connected yarn. Come on; we'll have the preface over before Guffa arrives."

The major stepped briskly across the tiled floor, followed at a more leisurely gait by the lieutenant. At the door of the library the two men hesitated and regarded each other with an expression of mock dismay. They looked for all the world like two schoolboys about to interview their headmaster. Then the major knocked softly on the door and in response to the shouted "Come in" the two men entered.

The journalist looked up with a frown which quickly changed to a smile as he saw who his visitors were.

"Hullo! major," he called jovially, and waved a sheet of paper, covered with his fine writing, in the air.

"I've got something here that will make you fellows sit up. Has the lieutenant told you? I thought he would. You know the humor of the thing has only just occurred to me, and I'm playing up that side in my *Weekly Letter*. Not too much, you know; I don't want my readers to lose sight of the seriousness of the affair."

"I'm glad you see the humorous side of it," said the major, as with much grunting he lowered himself into a chair. "We thought there was another side of the business you'd like to hear; didn't we, lieutenant?"

"Yes, rather. Something he ought to know."

The lieutenant, his lanky form stretched out full length on a lounge, was amusing himself by blowing intricate smoke rings. He looked the personification of laziness.

"I fancy I know enough," the journalist replied airily. "And I warn you that it will not be the least bit of use trying to induce me to hush this thing up. It isn't that I've got anything against you fellows personally. I like you immensely; think you're a bully crowd——"

"Thanks," murmured the lieutenant.

The journalist ignored the interruption.

"It's the system I'm against. Besides I've got to earn my money, you know, and you can imagine what a sensation my article will cause. They'll probably run it as a leader."

"We didn't intend to tell you anything," said the major, "only it occurred to me that you might like to hear the native story of the rebellion. I've just sent for the son of the chief who started the affair. He'll be here in fifteen minutes or less."

"Does he speak English?"

"No. But I will translate him as he goes along. I think I know enough of the language to give you the story he tells, as nearly as possible, using his idioms and figures of speech."

The major was modest. He was credited with knowing, and speaking fluently, more dialects than any man in the country. "It's a simple language," he continued, "and translated literally is reminiscent of King James' English."

"That's awfully decent of you. I'll use his story in my next week's letter. This one is almost finished and, if you'll excuse me, I'll just have time to finish it and have it ready for tonight's mail before this native arrives."

He turned to his writing.

The major sighed.

"If we only had Carden's luck!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"You expect too much, major," expostulated the lieutenant. "Carden's the luckiest man on earth. Do you remember when he had fever so bad and the doctor up country, unable to reduce his fever, sent him down here to die?"

"I should say I do," chuckled the major. "Wasn't I with him? And when a hippo came up underneath our dugout as we were crossing the Zambezi, tipping us all into the water, Carden was the first man to reach the shore—the fever all gone—and I'm hanged if he didn't dive in and help me to land! Then there was the regimental steeple-chase. Do you remember the bony old crock of Carden's? The cripple couldn't race a snail on a straight course, but Carden backed it to win at 60 to 1; and what happens? All the other entries come smashers at the water-jump and Carden's nag was

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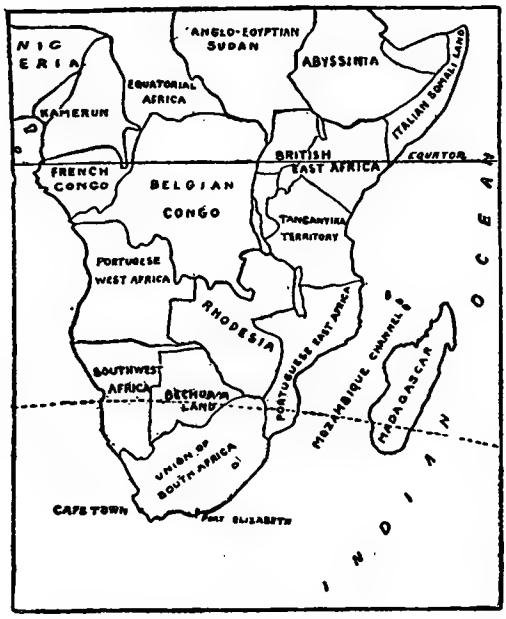

the only one to finish the course. Took him an hour to do it, but he was declared a winner and Carden collected a cool twenty thousand. Luck! Everything that man touches changes to gold."

"Speakin' of gold, major; there was that deserted mine he took in payment of a bad debt. It's one of the richest in the country now, they say."

The major nodded.

"And then there——"

At this juncture the journalist threw down his pen.

"Who's this man Carden, you're talking about?"

The major and the lieutenant exchanged triumphant glances which passed over the journalist's head.

"Carden?— Hope we didn't disturb you—Carden is an Irishman and one of the luckiest men I've ever known. His luck is proverbial; even the natives know of it and swear that he's a Child of the Spirits—or some such bunk. He lost his arm, poor chap, at the time of this rebellion."

"Then his luck didn't always hold?"

"He did seem out of luck at one time," assented the major. "But that was when he lost his fetish. He was wounded in the arm by an assagai. It was only a scratch, but when blood poisoning set in it was evident that amputation was the only thing that would save his life. There was no doctor at the fort—Carden was in charge at Fort Tuli—and as they were surrounded by a horde of savages, making it impossible to get Carden down to headquarters for treatment, things looked pretty black for him. Then he recovered his fetish, the rebellion suddenly petered out, and Carden was rushed to the base hospital.

"But the lieutenant could tell you more about that; he was at Fort Tuli at the time."

The journalist looked at the lieutenant reproachfully——

"You never told me that."

"I was afraid you would think I was spoofin' you."

"Well, tell me now."

"Yes, go on lieutenant," urged the major. "Spin your yarn; it'll help pass the time until Guffa arrives."

"THERE'S not a great deal I can tell you," began the lieutenant, rather hesitatingly, "and I'm not much of a hand at spinning a yarn.

"Fort Tuli, you know, is one of our frontier stations. The country thereabouts is desolate and uninteresting; nothing but bush—dirty, yellow, thorny, bush—and no game of any description, that is if you except hyenas. Nothing ever happened at the post; nothing ever varied the monotony of the scorching hot days and hotter nights; one day was very much like another, only worse. I think we would have gone mad with the deadly dullness of the place if it had not have been for Carden. He was the colonel in charge, you know, and full of irrepressible spirits; nothing could ever send him into a fit of the blues, and he was continually thinking up some scheme to keep the men contented."

"How many were there in the garrison, lieutenant?" interposed the journalist.

"Twenty whites and fifty native troops. I should have told you.

"On Christmas Day, I remember, Carden had the cook make an enormous plum pudding, and before it was brought into the mess room the colonel poured a bottle of brandy over it and adorned it with a sprig of 'wait-a-minute' thorn; to take the place of holly, he said. The temperature was about 120 degrees in the shade that day but the men greeted the soggy, flaming, mess—the cook was not exactly an expert—with wild cheers. It was a little touch of home.

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"Carden was, as the major said, frightfully lucky, and frightfully superstitious. Before he made any decision he always rubbed a ring which he wore on his left hand. Set in the seal of the ring was a shamrock leaf which had been plucked, Carden told us, at midnight on St. Patrick's eve. All the men were firm believers in the power of the ring—perhaps that accounts somewhat for his popularity—and there was not a man among us, white or black, but would have jumped into a river swarming with crocs if Carden asked us. Exaggeration? A little perhaps; but Carden had a charm all his own—I don't think he has an enemy in the world. That's his luck!

"But you don't want to believe that Carden was just 'lucky,' though it is true that his plans never went wrong until he lost his ring. It had been stolen (he reported one morning) from his finger when he was asleep, and for a time the men were almost in a state of mutiny; every one suspected every one else of having taken it hoping to get the colonel's luck.

"The native troops were especially downcast; they believed that it was a sign of evil and quite a number of them deserted the following night, and the word went round that the place was under a curse until the ring was restored. As for the colonel, he was as mad as a hatter and offered all sorts of extravagant rewards for its return."

"Mentioned in despatches and so forth," murmured the journalist.

"Then," continued the lieutenant hurriedly, frowning at the interruption, "we discovered that the colonel's native servant had disappeared, and hard on this discovery one of the native police boys reported that he had found the dead body of the colonel's servant hidden in some bushes nearby.

"We went out to examine the body. There was no mark on it to show how he had been killed, and clutched tightly in his hand were some cuff links, which the colonel recognized as his, but no sign of the ring. The evidence seemed to prove that the dead native was the thief; but who had murdered him and had taken the ring was a thing we were not yet to know.

"Things happened fast and furious then. A report came in that the natives were holding a big indaba—a Council of the Head Indunas—and all signs pointed to trouble. Carden sent a message to headquarters, one hundred miles away, giving warning of a possible uprising, and suggested that he be allowed to strike first. If he hadn't lost the ring, and some of his confidence, he would have struck first and asked authority for his action afterward, thereby saving a great deal of trouble.

"While waiting for the reply Carden tried to solve the mystery of his servant's murder, but was obliged to give up his investigations, outside the fort at least, because of the attitude of the natives. Settlers, with their families, came in to the fort for security. They too had sensed the danger of an uprising and by the time the messenger returned from headquarters, no fewer than twenty familes were added to our population—not to mention a missionary with thirty native converts. We were somewhat crowded, I assure you.

"I can't give you the full details of the answer to Carden's report, but here's the gist of it: We were not under any consideration to take the initiative; in the case of an attack upon the fort, Carden was instructed first to attempt to dispel it by firing a few rounds of blank cartridges. Should that fail we were permitted to use the real things. Finally the clever gentlemen at headquarters assured us that we were making mountains out of mole-hills, and according to reports received from reliable sources, the country was never in a more settled condition."

"That order came from Briggs," commented the major. "He was a self-sufficient little ass. But go on, lieutenant."

"I'm nearly through, major," the lieutenant continued with a yawn.

"Carden cursed like a bargee at that order, but he made the mistake of showing it to the missionary, who said that he hoped Carden did not entertain the thought of disobeying headquarters.

"That same day one of the white troopers was captured within a short distance of the fort, stripped of his clothing, beaten, and sent back with the message that on the morrow an *impi* would attack us and kill us all.

"AT SUNRISE the next morning some two hundred natives came to the edge of the clearing which encircled the fort, and after singing a bloodthirsty chant, made a rush toward us, brandishing their assagais, and yelling as they ran. An old witch-doctor in his hideous regalia led the attack. When they

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were about a couple of hundred yards from the stockade, Carden—the missionary was standing beside him—gave the order to fire a round of blank cartridges.

"The warriors stopped at the volley as though turned into stone, and the witch doctor danced up and down before them—calling maledictions down upon our heads. He was a very indecent old covey, and some of his remarks, pertaining to our ancestry and morals, made the missionary squirm.

" 'Give them another round or two, boys,' Carden ordered. 'Blanks, mind!'

"Three more volleys were fired and after the last smoke had drifted away the warriors, shouting joyfully, retreated into the shelter of the bush and vanished from sight.

"The missionary was jubilant and quoted something about 'a soft answer turneth away wrath.'

"But Carden was worried and we others couldn't believe that the rebellion had fizzled out so quietly.

"However two days passed and nothing happened. The scouts reported that everything seemed quiet and the missionary, with his native converts, started the exodus of the refugees to their own homesteads. By midday our population had dwindled down to its normal state; not a settler remained with us though Carden tried his best to persuade them to stay.

"That same night an old gray-bearded native, one of the missionary's flock, crawled to the gate in the stockade. He was horribly mutilated and the wonder is that he lived to reach us. He told a frightful story. A party of warriors had surrounded them just as they neared the mission station. The missionary, after attempting to parley with them, had encouraged his little flock to defend themselves. This only infuriated the warriors still further and the end came very quickly. But before they killed the missionary and the few of his followers who were still alive after the skirmish, the warriors subjected them to nameless tortures.

" 'Au-a!' exclaimed the old man, with almost his last breath. 'The wicked spirits are fighting against you, white men. The end of your race is drawing near. You can not stand against the Black Ones, for theirs is the power of *The Charm*.'

"The light of fires shot up through the darkness, and each fire marked the location of a settler's homestead. From the bush beyond the clearing encircling the fort came the war chant of the Matabele. The rebellion was on with a vengeance, and we were isolated as surely as though we had been castaways on a desert island. There was no chance, as we soon discovered, of sending a message for help to headquarters.

"At roll-call next morning the colonel's batman, a man who was devoted to Carden—more of a friend than a soldier servant—was missing. His name? Jock Thompson."

"I think I'm beginning to see things," murmured the journalist.

The lieutenant smiled enigmatically.

"COME IN!" shouted the major in response to a loud knock. "It's Guffa, I think," he added.

The door opened slowly and a tall, powerfully built native entered. He was dressed in the khaki shorts, blue jumper, and red fez of the B. S. A. N. P. (British South African Native Police).

He saluted the white men smartly.

"The inkosi sent for me?" he said, addressing the major in the vernacular.

"Aye. Come nearer. This inkosi," the major indicated the journalist with a wave of his hand, "understands not the speech of your people. He desires to hear the tale of the uprising; the tale you tell he will set down on paper that the white people across the Great Waters may know of the wonder. It shall be my part to make known to him thy words. Speak slowly therefore, heeding not the sound of my voice."

"It is an order."

The journalist rubbed his hands gleefully, then handed Guffa a cigar and bade him be seated. The big native looked inquiringly at the major who nodded his head. Guffa accepted the cigar, put it carefully in the pocket of his tunic, then sat down, legs crossed tailor-fashion, on the floor.

"It is well," he began, "that the white man permits me to tell the story in my own tongue; the words that I know of his language are few and the story so told would be as unfermented ale. Somewhat of the story I do not, even at this time, understand; but because you are white and akin to these others, that which is to me as the back of my hand in the dark, will be as light as day to you."

In a deep monotone the major's translation of the story kept even pace with Guffa.

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The journalist, all through the unfolding of the story, sat watching the native with something like awed fascination. Guffa was, as are all Matabele, a born orator, and he held the white man spell-bound; there were times when his gestures and facial expression almost carried on the tale; when the journalist was only subconsciously aware of the major's voice above the musical cadence of Guffa's low, musical speech.

"MY FATHER, you must know, was paramount chief in the District of Tuli. His fighting men, men in the prime of their strength, trained fighters, men who knew no law but the law of my father, numbered fully two thousand. It was a sight of sights to see them as massed for battle, ostrich plumes upon their heads—else were they naked save for a kilt of feathers.

"Many a time have I—seated at the right hand of my father—was I not his only son?—watched the *impis* give him the honor due to a paramount chief.

"By companies of fifty they gathered at the far end of the clearing—the Council Place; a great silence was everywhere; even the dogs ceased their yapping—the goats forgot to bleat. Then the earth would tremble under the feet of many men as they came forward toward us; slowly at first, but gradually increasing the pace; it was a mighty, rushing river of nodding plumes; a moving wall, steel-topped with the assagais of the warriors.

"When but twenty paces from the seat of the chief, when it seemed that he must needs be trampled under the feet of the onrushing men, the warriors would halt. A loud throbbing noise rent the air; the beating of spear heads on the bullock-hide shields. Louder and louder, faster and faster sounded the beat; then, when it seemed that the drumming must pierce the dark caverns leading to the abode of departed spirits, it ceased. The stillness that followed was even more fearsome than was the throbbing.

"For the space of sixty heart-beats the silence lasted; a short while, yet it seemed as though ages passed before us. Then as one man the warriors threw up their hands, their spears pointing downwards towards their hearts, and as from one throat came the cry——

" 'Bayete,' and 'Bayete!' thrice repeated.

"Of a truth such a sight and such a cry was one well calculated to strike terror into the hearts of our foes; sapping their strength so that victory was assured to us.

"But why do I talk of foes? We were at peace; never before had our cattle been so numerous, our crops so flourishing; there was marriage and the giving-of-marriage feasts.

"The white men lived among us and dealt justly with us, and we with them. But some few white men there were whose hearts were black; still others—the makers of the white men's laws—who did not know us or understand our customs. True it is that these men were like thorns in our feet; they caused a festering sore which would not heal.

"We are a proud people, we Matabele. Never have we been vanquished in battle; no, not even in the bloody war against the white men when Lobenguela led our impis against the usurpers of our land. We made peace that time only because Rhodes—he my people call *Umlamulankanzi*, the Peacemaker, was a man of single heart and showed the chiefs at the big indaba in the Motopos, that peace was better than war; that the raising of cattle was better than the shedding of blood. A man among men was Rhodes. It is said by my people that he will come again when a big evil threatens; of that I do not know. Rhodes you say, is dead, but can you say that the matter of his returning is beyond the power of the Spirits?

"As I have said, we are a fighting people and a life of peace ill becomes us. So it was that every evil worked by a white man against us—even though that evil was the fruit of ignorance—caused many to listen when the hot heads urged war against the white men. Aye; we condemned all white men because of the evil of a few. And that was not just, you say? Mayhap. But when a man does not see eye to eye with another, a very little thing is cause enough for quarrel.

"Especially bitter at such times was Molinda, the witch-doctor; a man whose power in the district was second only to that of the chief, my father. Nay, in some things my father bent his will to that of Molinda.

"He was a strange man, this Molinda, and so old, men said, that he witnessed the Beginning of Time. That I can not altogether believe, but I have heard my father's

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father say—and he was very old—that Molinda was gray and toothless with age when he was but a stripling, a tender of cattle.

"At will Molinda could summon the dead to commune with him; the rains came, and ceased at his bidding; the knowledge of health-giving, aye, and of death-dealing, herbs was his. And wo to any man who crossed his will; that man might live to see one, perhaps two, but assuredly not three, settings of the sun.

"Nothing was hidden from Molinda; a tiny spark in the darkness of a distant hut was as plain to him as the blaze of the noonday sun; did the maidens whisper at the water hole, making a mock of holy things as maidens are wont to do, the whisper was carried by the Spirits of the Air to the ears of the witch doctor. And rest assured that those foolish maidens would, in due course, pay for their folly.

"All mighty, was Molinda. But pay heed to the folly of certain white men in authority.

"An order went forth from the white men that Molinda—that all witch doctors—must refrain from the wonder-workings of their craft; from the trial by fire; the hot water test; the 'smelling out' of witches, and from other things—some of which we now know to have been deeds of darkness.

"The order made no acknowledgment of the wisdom and healing powers of Molinda's kind. 'They are all abomination' said the white men, 'lying tricksters and workers of evil.'

"It is beyond my power to tell thee of the anger of Molinda when the thing was made known to him; he was as a man gone mad, and a great hatred toward all white men was born within him.

"Hither and yon through the district he went, visiting all the kraals, stirring up the people, telling them that a war of vengeance was at hand.

" 'Only wait,' he said, 'but a little while. The time is not yet ripe. See therefore that ye make no untoward movement that will arouse the suspicion of the whites against ye. Wait until a sign comes to me from the Great Spirits, whose mouthpiece I am. When that comes, and the waiting will not be long, thy spears shall drink their fill of the blood of the white men, and ye shall all be as kings.'

"My father and some of his older counsellors were deeply grieved at the sayings of Molinda—remembering the power of the white men—yet dared not put a curb to his tongue. Indeed it was with difficulty that they restrained the younger men who wished not to wait for the coming of the word to Molinda.

" 'Kill!' they cried. 'Kill, till not a fighting man be left. We are Matabele; we are content to die.'

"The moon waxed and waned, and then came Molinda to my father bidding him call to his kraal the indunas of high rank and low, the captains of the *impis*, and the headmen of kraals. Nor would Molinda say to what end the indaba was to be held and my father, though wondering greatly, sent out the call.

"On the night appointed for the indaba, all who had been bidden were assembled at the Council Place—the large clearing that is about the hut of my father.

"A large fire was burning, elsewise was the place in darkness; and in darkness we waited, and watched for the coming of Molinda, in silence.

"Once a man, a little bolder than the rest, called out to the chief:

" 'Say, O chief! To what end are we brought hither to the Council Place? My eyes grow weary of the darkness; my bones are stiff from inaction.'

" 'Have patience,' my father replied. 'Molinda will be with us in his own good time, and he will doubtless make all things clear to us.'

"HARDLY had his words died away when the witch doctor appeared by the side of the fire. So sudden was his coming that it seemed—and mayhap the seeming was a reality—as though he had walked out from the heart of the fire.

"He was naked save for a leopard skin about his middle, and his wrinkled, ashy gray skin was covered with the paintings which tell the story of the Spirits. The necklace of Life and Death hung about his neck; in his hands he held the bushy tail of a jackal.

"The fire died down, the darkness deepened; men felt gropingly about them with their hands, seeking to make sure that they were not alone in the darkness; alone with that dread man, Molinda. As for the witch doctor, every line on his face was as clear

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to us as though he stood in the blaze of the sun.

"Nay; ask me not how this might be. I speak of things as I saw them.

"At last Molinda spoke, his voice was like the harsh croaking of a vulture, and there was not a man among us who missed a word he uttered. His was the voice of one to whom a reward has been given after long waiting.

" 'I come to ye people,' so ran the words of Molinda, 'from the presence of the Great Spirits; the smoke of their fire still stings my nostrils. Ask me not how I went or the manner of my return. That is a mystery, the weight of which would crush ye to the ground. Yet rejoice that I, the Mouthpiece of the Spirits, should have been permitted to return to ye; rejoice yet again that to me has been given the Word of the *Great Dead Ones*.

" 'Aye, it is indeed so. The day of the white men has passed; they will fall before the spears of our warriors as the leaves fall from a tree in the time of its sleep, and a big wind blows through its branches. No longer are ye to dwell under the heel of the whites; no longer are ye to live like slaves—paying a tax for the land which is rightfully yours. Arise, O ye Matabele. Arise and slay!'

"And as one man the Councillors, my father among them, arose and cried—

" 'We are the Matabele. We do not fear death.'

" 'Who speaks of death for the Matabele?' screamed Molinda.

" 'Listen again, O unworthy ones, to the greatness of the honor which has come to ye. A wonder working has been performed; a great power has been given to me—even a charm which will turn the bullets of the white men.'

"From the throats of the listeners came a softly breathed 'Au-a!' It spoke of wonder, of doubt that such a thing could be.

" 'Doubters!' scoffed Molinda. 'Faint hearts! Of a truth ye are not worthy. Heed well. Who knows not of the great charm which the white Lord at the fort wears on his hand? Who is there that doubts its power to accomplish all things?'

"And we answered—

" 'We all know of the charm; none doubt its power!'

"And it was the truth we spoke. For long had the power of the charm worn by the Inkosi Carden been known to us, and well we knew that it had preserved him—and such people as were with him—from all forms of death; from fever and from the beasts of prey. Is it not a tale, of times told, that at the time of the big rebellion led by Lobenguela this Inkosi, and those who were with him—no more, look you, than could be counted on the fingers of two hands—marched against an *impi* of a thousand men who sought to bar their way. And the wonder of it! The warriors gave way to them and the white men passed through unharmed! Yes; the power of the charm was well known to us.

" 'Again pay heed to me,' continued Molinda. 'Last night it was that I sat in the darkness of my hut, calling upon the Great Ones, when suddenly a sound as of a mighty rushing wind filled the place, and there stood before me, clothed in the majesty of night, *Inkoosikaas*—the Queen of the Heavens. In silence she took my hand and a sudden sleep fell upon me; yet it seemed that my spirit wandered with the Great One as she traveled to the far corners of the world. After a while we came to a place which, it seemed to me, I knew as well as the palm of my hand. It was the fort of the white men. The mist which had been floating before my eyes dissolved and I saw, sleeping peacefully, the white Inkosi—the Man of the Charm.

" 'Then the *Great One* bent down swiftly and took from the finger of the sleeping man the Charm. He stirred uneasily as though troubled by evil dreams. A great fear took hold of me. Then the mists closed down again and I knew no more. I awakened with the rising of the sun and lo! upon the finger of my left hand—it is there now—glistened the Charm! Behold!'

"Molinda held out his hand bidding the chief and the leaders of the *impis* to go nearer to him that they might report to all of the truth of his words.

" 'And now,' he continued, 'the Great Spirit who has spoken to you through me, is weary and desires to go to her own place.'

"A white, blinding flame suddenly shot up through the darkness; strange noises, as of hidden voices, sounded all about us.

" 'The Queen of the Heavens has gone to her own place. See then,' so said Molinda, 'that you obey her commands lest She visit you in anger. Give the order, O chief, for your warriors to march against the whites.'

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"'I am of two minds, O Dread Man,' answered my father. 'It is not that I doubt the things I have just heard—judge me not a scoffer of the Spirits—yet do I know full well of the wonders of the white men. Did I not fight against them when Lobenguela was a great shadow in the land? I know of the gun whose voice is like the beating of many war drums; and its voice is death. How can we, armed only with assagais and shields, go against men who have a charm which will kill men at thirty, nay, fifty, spearthrows distant. What wonder-working of thine is proof against that wonder-working?'

"Now the words of my father found favor in the eyes of the councillors, but they dared not speak lest they give offense to Molinda.

"'So the Chief doubts the words of the Great Spirit,' he said, and there was something in his voice which chilled the blood.

"'It is not that I doubt, Molinda, but rather am I as a child, lost in the bush, not knowing which path to take. Give me a sign that I may see the way clearly.'

"'It is well,' answered Molinda, after a long silence. 'Thus says the Great Spirit. Appoint some men, O chief—but the tenth part of an *impi*—to follow me on the morrow. We will go up against the fort of the white men as though going to the attack. Then shall be seen the power of the Charm. After that shall the preparations be made for the great killing.'

"The chief, my father, agreed to this plan and sending for the women folk gave order that beer should be served to us, thus signifying that the indaba was at an end.

"That same night some of our young men captured one of the white men from the fort. Him they stripped of his clothing, beat him with a sjambok, then bade him return to his people with the words that on the morrow a party of warriors would attack the fort, and put all the white men to death.

"With the rising of the sun Molinda led some five score warriors to the attack while we others watched; hidden in the thick bushes.

"On went the warriors, singing the Song of the Slaying. Suddenly the crashing of guns drowned the song. The warriors stopped. The white men in the fort fired again and again. But, and it is the truth I speak, not one bullet sped to its mark; not one man was sent to the long sleep! We could doubt no longer! The power of the Charm was all mighty, even as Molinda had said!

"Slowly the warriors returned to us hidden ones singing the Song of Victory, and we added the sound of our voices to theirs. They say that the echo of our song sounded in the kraals a full day's march distant.

"'Death to the white men,' we cried. 'Bulala—kill!'

"I speak of the things as I saw them and in the order of their happening.

"That same day my father sent word to all the kraals owing allegiance to him, that the time foretold by Molinda had arrived, bidding the men of fighting age to hasten to him that the muster might be complete, and as vultures gather at the scent of blood, so came the warriors in answer to my father's bidding.

"Certain warriors, men of the kraal of Thuso, attacked the people of the Umfundisi, torturing and putting to death the missionary and the black dogs who followed him.

"My father, as I remember, was greatly angered, for he had given an order that no move be made against the whites—lest they take alarm, and flee—until he gave the word. Aye; it was also an evil act, for it is not the way of the Matabele to torture. But the people of Thuso were well dealt with, they were punished justly; men did not live in those days who dared to disobey the commands of my father.

"THE muster was complete. Two thousand fighting-men were at the kraal of my father, and each one had placed his hand on the Charm that his body might be spared from the bullets of the white men. Bands of warriors were sent out to the kraals of the white settlers. In the night, so it was ordered, they were to surround the places and kill all who dwelled therein. None were to be shown mercy—neither women or children.

"That was ever the way of the Matabele, and who shall say it was an evil way. What say you? Shall we spare the children of our foes; permitting them to grow up and be a thorn in our side? Nay. It is easier to govern a land destitute of people than one populated by the children of dead foes.

"The blood of twenty and two white men, and that of their women and children, stained the spears of our warriors that night,

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and as the first light of burning huts reddened the darkness, we others surrounded the fort; taunting the white men to come out and face us.

"Nevertheless, we kept well in the shelter of the bush, because the order had gone forth that the fort was not to be attacked until the Slayers—the men who had put the settlers to death—had returned and reported their achievements.

"Also it is not the way of the Matabele to fight in the dark hours of the night. The killing of men in their sleep is altogether another matter. It is a dark deed and one well performed in the darkness. It is only in the light of day, at the rising of the sun look you, that we meet the foe face to face. At that time should we fall, the evil spirits, the Spirits of Darkness, can not take our souls to their place of desolation.

"Four times that night the 'Lord of the Fort' sent out men who tried to get through our lines, and so make their way to the great white kraal at Bulawayo. Each messenger was captured by our warriors. Three of them, black dogs of the Mashona race, we slew. The other, a white man, we sent back to the fort, his hands bound, his mouth gagged so that he could make no sound. Two warriors walked close beside him. When he came to the stockade the warriors drove their spears through his arms, thus pinning him to the gate."

"That was Carden," interposed the lieutenant. "He didn't have the heart, he said, when he handed over the command to me, to call for volunteers for the job. He knew the country better than any of the rest of us; and he was bushwise. If anybody could get through, Carden was the man. But you know what happened. Except for a slight scratch on the arm the assagais didn't touch him. He had a thick coat on and the night was quite dark, you know. That probably explains why the warriors didn't do a better job."

"No other messengers did the white lord send out," continued Guffa. "Indeed to have done so would have been folly. It would have been easier for a bull to crawl into the hole of an earthworm than for a man to break through the lines of our warriors. True this was, also, when a goodly number of us returned to the kraal that we might hear of the accomplishments of the Slayers; a thousand spears still encircled the fort.

"Some of these men had guns which they had taken from the deserters, and fired when any white showed himself above the stockade of the fort. Yet it was a strange thing that the white men did not answer the fire."

"We were conserving ammunition," murmured the lieutenant. "Besides, there was nothing to shoot at."

"I have said, have I not," continued Guffa, "that no man could get through the ranks of the watchers? Then listen to the wonder of things.

"THE warriors, one thousand, no less, were at the Council Place; rank after rank of them, their faces agleam with the blood lust; eager for the word that would send them against the white men, killing until their arms, for very weariness, could rise and fall no more. Ah! The rivers would run red with blood; the blossom of the flowers would be stained crimson.

"The plans of my father had been well carried out; the settlers were in the Land of the Spirits—not one had escaped to carry the news to the white lord at Bulawayo. Remained only the fort and then, when that had fallen, we could sweep on, driving the white men before us into the 'great-water-which-never-sleeps.'

"The women served us with food and much beer; the maidens carried like provisions to the warriors who watched by the fort. We were full of the self-confidence which comes to men whose bellies are well filled. And so we gathered our weapons to us and, giving the chief the Royal Salute, prepared for the task which confronted us. The captains and sub-captains of *impis;* the greater and the lesser leaders; the chief, and I his son, passed before Molinda, and each in passing touched the charm which the witch doctor held out on the palm of his hand toward us.

"Suddenly a mocking laugh rang out and a voice cried:

" 'Fools! Will ye put your faith in the magic of a white man? Know ye not that that liar, that man of cunning tricks, that man known to you all as Molinda, caused that ring to be taken from the hand of a white man while that white man was sleeping? But of course ye do not know that; neither do ye know how Molinda slew the man who stole the ring. Such things

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Molinda would not tell ye; rather he would say that the Charm was given to him by the Spirits.'

"We looked around in amazement seeking to find the scoffer, and then from the hut of the chief emerged a white man, stretching himself and yawning as a man just awakened from sleep. For a moment we were as men of stone, unable to move, so great was our wonder at his appearance. And then the bodyguard of the chief surrounded him and dragged him before my father.

"What manner of man was this stranger? A tall man, well past the age of youth; his hair was white with the flour of age. Slow he seemed in his movements, but it was the slowness of strength.

" 'Who art thou? and from whence came ye?' asked my father.

" 'I am sent to save ye from folly,' answered the stranger; and he spoke our tongue as one who learned it while yet a child.

" 'It may well be that I have come to ye from the Land of the Spirits. Undoubtedly I speak to ye with the wisdom of the Great Ones.'

"Again he began to laugh—madly.

" 'Without doubt,' we thought, 'this man is afflicted by the Spirits.'

"But Molinda, his face alight with anger, sprang to his feet.

" 'What now,' he cried. 'Is it your intention, chief, to let this man, one of the accursed race, make a mock of us? Why is it that he still lives?'

" 'Have patience for a little while, Molinda,' answered my father. 'It may well be that this man's mind is afflicted—that his mind is like that of a little child. If that is so, no hand shall be raised against him. You know our custom. But it may be that he is playing a part and I would learn something from him.'

Then turning to the white man my father said:

" 'Tell us, stranger, and speak truly, how ye came to this place, and to what end? That thou art one of the warriors from the fort is betrayed by thy dress.'

" 'In the darkness of the night,' laughed the white man, 'I left the fort—crawling on my belly like a snake. All things are known to me; I speak with the voices of the creatures who live in the jungle. There was a snapping of a twig, perchance, beneath my hand, and a warrior came running to the sound. But his eyes saw nothing and to his ear came the hiss of a snake—or the fluttering of a bird in the bush—or the neigh of *idubi*—or the snort of a wart hog. And when other warriors asked him what caused the snapping of the twig, he replied—even as his ears had told him. But, and heed this well, I was the snake, the bird, the zebra and the bush pig; and so I came unseen to this place, hiding myself beneath the skins which are heaped in a corner of the chief's hut.'

" 'What need for more?' cried Molinda. 'By no art of magic did he come to this place. Let him die.'

"My father still hesitated and the white man continued:

" 'Think not that I came hither with malice in my heart, or desiring to work evil against thee, O chief. Had I been so minded I could have struck thee down while sleep was still heavy upon thee.'

" 'Then why art thou here?'

" 'To tell thee, aye and to make it known to all thy people, that Molinda hath tricked thee. The Charm he boasts of will work evil against ye. It is a white man's charm; it——'

" 'Delay not further,' cried Molinda. 'Why heed the words of a liar? The sun grows high in the heavens; already ye have witnessed the power of the Charm.'

"And echoing the cry of the witch doctor, many of the warriors shouted—

" 'On to the slaughter. Dally no longer, O Chief.'

"And so, first ordering certain of his bodyguard to keep a close watch over the white man, my father gave the word which we so eagerly awaited.

"As we moved off at the run, the Song of Slaughter burst from a thousand throats; but above the thunder of our song, sounded the mocking laughter of the white man.

" 'Ye are going to meet death,' I heard him cry. 'The Charm is a white man's charm; it will not aid ye.'

"Then I, and some others who heard him, remembering how the Charm had worked that other time, answered his jeers with ruder jeers; his laughter with scorn.

"But listen to the end of it. I speak of things as I saw them.

"We joined forces with those who had been appointed to watch through the night and then, with the cry '*Bulala!*—Kill!'

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rushed toward the fort, closing in on it from all sides. The earth trembled beneath our feet; many vultures gathered in the air above us.

"There was no thought of death in our hearts, only the lust for blood.

"AS WE drew nearer the fort, drawing tighter the ring of warriors, a blade of grass could not have passed between a warrior and those on either side of him; before or behind him. And wo to the man who lost his footing—as some few did—those behind trampled the breath from his body.

"Four hundred paces; three hundred paces!

" 'They are already dead,' the shout went up. 'Fear has killed them! Great is the power of the Charm!'

"Two hundred paces from the fort; and then the guns of the white men spoke.

"Au—a! The killing of the settlers and their women-folk, the torturing of the missionary and his people, were well avenged.

"As grass is flattened by the heavy rains, so fell the warriors of my father. Not in ones and twos, but in rows. The earth was covered with their dead bodies.

"*Rat—tat—tat* spoke the guns of many voices, and death filled the air. Like frightened cattle the men in the rear ranks pressed forward, stumbling over the bodies of the fallen ones, and they too met death. Try as we might we could get no nearer to the stockade. It was as though a line had been drawn beyond which we could not pass.

"At length my father gave the order to retreat, and with dismay in our hearts we sullenly obeyed.

"Two hundred men fell and many others, Molinda among them, were sorely wounded. Of a truth the stranger white man was all wise; the Charm was not for us.

"A fierce anger burned in our hearts against the witch doctor. Because of his boasting we had followed an evil course. Not, let it be understood, that we heeded the slaying of our warriors—it is the part of men to die in battle—but we, trusting in the power of the Charm, and not in the strength of our might, had failed to accomplish our purpose. Yes. Our sorrow was not for the men who had fallen, but because we—men among men—had been driven away from the fort like silly goats who have no leaders.

"Leaving men to keep watch we returned to the kraal of my father to hold an indaba.

"Molinda, because of his calling, was the first to speak.

"At first we listened to him scornfully, but soon the power of the man—all wounded though he was—took hold of us and we listened with awe in our hearts. He was truly a great man.

" 'This time,' he said, 'ye failed, the Charm failed, because there are Evil Spirits working against me. Let there be silence for a little while that I may commune with the Spirits, praying that they will point out the guilty ones to me.'

"And so all noises were hushed and in the stillness Molinda prayed aloud to the Spirits. Then for a time he sat as one from whom all life has gone.

" 'It is finished,' he said at length. 'The Spirits are all merciful. Let these guilty ones be set on one side; death must be their portion.'

"And then he cried aloud the names of certain of the warriors; among them were captains of *impis*, headmen and indunas. Lastly he named the white stranger. Sixty and five men in all were marked by the witch doctor as agents of the Evil Ones.

"And then, when the 'smelling out' was finished, my father said:

" 'All shall be done according to thy desire regarding these wicked ones, O Molinda. Death shall be their portion. I would say this, further. Think not that I doubt thy words or question thy wisdom, but this is my judgment. Messengers will I send, north, south, east and west, bidding all the tribes to join me, promising them great honors if they will help to drive the white men from this land. I waver not in my purpose; I have spoken the words; the words have passed my lips and they may not be recalled. Not again will we trust solely to the power of the Charm. My warriors are many and mighty; my captains are cunning leaders. They are the rods upon which I lean; they, by the strength of their arms and their cunning prowess in battle, shall put the whites to slaughter.

" 'If the Charm has regained its power, well and good; but, for good or evil, I will rely on it no longer.'

" 'Thy words are words of great wisdom,' cried the warriors. 'Only lead us to the battle with the cunning that is truly thine

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and the end is sure. And if some fall, what then? We are the Matabele. We are not afraid to die.'

"And, strange to say, Molinda seemed well content. He only desired, I think, the killing of the white men who sought to hinder his ways.

"And then my father bethought him of the stranger white man who had prophesied the evil that had befallen us, and ordered him to be brought into his presence.

"When the stranger came to the Council Place, led between two guards, he began to laugh and jeer at us.

" 'What is this' he cried. 'Sorrow sits upon the faces of the warriors. I smell blood, the blood of slain ones. Men limp who before walked swiftly. Surely a magic, an evil stinging magic, has afflicted ye. Is it the magic of Molinda? Nay, for he too is sore smitten. What then? Is it that the Charm in no way aided ye? that the bullets of the white men swarmed about ye—stinging like so many angry hornets?'

" 'It was even so, Stranger,' answered the chief, my father. 'The Charm was of no avail, but we go again against thy people trusting not in the power of charms, but in the strength of my *impis*. This time we shall not fail, and thou shalt go with us to see the slaughter.'

" 'O fools!' scoffed the stranger. 'Of a truth the end of the white man is at hand if ye obey the words of the Spirits; but not alone can ye do this thing. Think of the wonder of things. I, a white man, have been sent to direct ye in the right way. The Charm of Molinda failed—and remember well that I so prophesied—because it was the Charm of a white man. But now let me be unbound and I will show ye a new magic.'

"At first my father would have none of it, but the warriors cried:

" 'Let us see it, O chief. It can do no harm.'

"So the stranger was unbound and with great speed he set about making his charm, crying aloud to the Great Spirits as he worked; calling on the Dread Lords of Life and Death, of the Beginning and End of all Things: Aye, he greatly dared, thrice speaking the names of 'Those-whose-names-must-not-be-mentioned.'

"After a while he said——

" 'The thing is finished, O chief. Behold!'

"What manner of thing was this charm? I will tell ye.

"A long pole he had taken, choosing with great care one about the thickness of three fingers; as straight, it was, as the shaft of my spear. To the end of this pole he had tied a white garment which he tore from his body. It fluttered idly in the breeze.

" 'Heed me,' he cried. 'This is a charm calling the White Spirits to thy aid; it is a Charm of Peace. Where it goes, death cannot come. Let one be appointed, O chief, a man worthy of great honor—such a man as thyself—to carry it before the warriors as they go to battle. So will it perform great wonders. Molinda told ye that his Charm would turn aside the bullets of the white men. Molinda's charm failed. This Charm will take away all strength from the white men, all thoughts of killing; not a gun shall be fired at ye. With this carried at thy head ye can march from here to the Great Waters, and none will molest ye.'

" 'Have a care; he seeks to trick ye!' cried Molinda.

"And my father—

"'I have passed my word to put no further faith in charms. I think I did thee too great an honor when I said it would be permitted thee to witness the slaughter. Thy death shall come to thee now.'

"The warrior guards raised their assagais and looked to the chief for the signal that would send their spears down to drink the blood of the white man.

"He began to laugh.

" 'Fools!' and yet again, 'Fools!' he cried. 'Go to thy death, it is of no matter to me. But say; are there no men here worthy of death?

"He looked around at the warriors and his eyes fell upon those who had been 'smelled out' by Molinda.

" 'Thyself,' said my father.

" 'Truly,' replied the white man. 'But I cannot die until all is fulfilled. Are not these black ones marked to die?'

" 'Aye,' answered the chief slowly. 'Those dogs are to die, for they practised witchcraft against me.'

" 'Then put my Charm to the test, O chief. Let these men march up and down before the fort—carrying no weapons, for none are needed—and as they are treated, so let me be treated.'

" 'It is good,' said the chief, and so it was ordered.

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"Once again then we repaired to the fort and watched, hidden in the bushes, while the doomed men marched across the clearing; one of their number carried the Charm before them. And, listen to the wonder of it, the guns of the white men were silent. To the very gates of the fort they marched, and it seemed to us that they held speech with certain of the white men.

"And so it was. When these men who had been marked for death returned to us, he who had carried the Charm said to my father:

"'Great is the power of this wonder-working, O chief. To the white leader I said, "Why dost thou not fire upon us?" and he replied: "That which ye bear in your hands stops up our guns; your bodies are sacred to us. Is the chief with you?" "Nay," I answered. "Let him come then," the white man replied, "and we will open the gates to him."

"We thought," said the lieutenant, "that the beggars wanted to parley with us."

"And then," continued Guffa, "my father called the captains of his *impis* to him and, taking the Charm, marched across the clearing toward the fort. Molinda, carried on the shoulders of four men, went with them as was his right; and the white man also that he might be a witness of the slaying of his people. That the chief, my father, had promised him.

"On they went while we others watched with wonder in our hearts. To the gates of the stockade they came! The gates opened and they marched triumphantly in. The gates closed again, and from the throats of the warriors came a shout of victory; nothing could harm us! The Spirits were with us! To us was given the Lordship of the earth."

Guffa rose slowly to his feet, chagrin and mirth struggling for the mastery. Finally he said with a broad grin:

"The rest is known to you. Is it permitted that I depart? The hour of my duty approaches."

"It is well," answered the major absently. "You have my leave to go."

"I WONDER," continued the major as the door closed behind the native's stalwart figure, "if that was altogether playing the game?"

The lieutenant looked at him in astonishment.

"Well, what else could we have done, sir? We admitted them to the fort in good faith, thinking they had come to parley—and deuced glad we were to do it. We hadn't enough ammunition to ward off another attack. Besides we wanted to get Carden to a doctor— You wouldn't have had us let them go again, surely?"

"No. Of course you did the only possible thing, but——"

"Please," interposed the journalist. "I want to hear what happened when the chief entered the fort. It's not fair to keep me in suspense like this."

The lieutenant grinned.

"Never satisfied, are you? It was not until the chief and his party were well inside the stockade that we first saw Jock Thompson. He was almost as naked as the day he was born, and grinning like a Cheshire Cat.

"'What's all this mean, Jock?' Carden asked.

"He had insisted on being carried from his hut when he heard that the chief was coming to parley.

"'I've brought your luck back, colonel,' says Jock.

"He took the ring from the witch-doctor's hand and gave it to Carden.

"'That heathen,' he continued, 'tried to make a magic with it, but it didn't work.'

"'But who are these johnnies?' Carden indicated the bewildered chief and his escort—things were happening too swift for the old boy, and we didn't understand ourselves then—didn't for a long time after. Jock isn't what you'd call a talkative chap.

"'Oh them,' says Jock. 'They're my prisoners. Better hold them as hostages, colonel. Reckon the rebellion won't amount to much if you do, and let them know that they'll die a slow and painful death if the rebellion doesn't stop.'

"And of course it was just as Jock said. Before that day was over the chief had sent orders to his *impis* to disband; the war of the Charm was over."

"Come on," said the major. "It must be nearly scoff time. Just a few minutes to spare to have a drink; talking's dry work."

The journalist slowly tore up the letter he had been writing.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I'm coming with you."

As he followed the two men out of the room they heard him mutter:

"'I found the ring, and got the reward. That's all there is to it.' ——, what a story! If I can only write it!"

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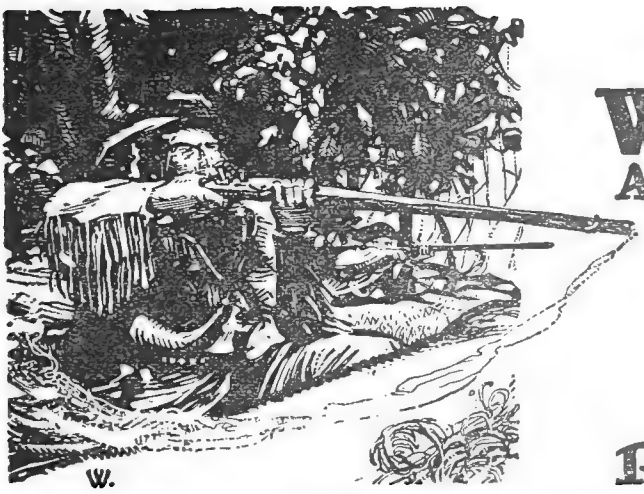

WAR WAMPUM

A Five-Part Story

Part 1

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The White Dawn," "Pay Gravel," etc.

FOREWORD

THE SENTENCE

A SONG of rejoicing resounded from New York province to the Carolinas when word was brought from Canada in September, 1760, that Montreal had capitulated. From the seacoast towns back to isolated hamlets in the Alleghanies bonfires burned briskly, as merchant and backwoodsman celebrated the great victory by this ancient means of expression. There was no man living who could remember a time in America when England's foe was not sending the red men to harass the frontiers.

For two hundred years the colonists had moved north and south without daring to venture beyond the mountains. It was difficult to teach the mind that this restriction was no more and that the door to the west at last was open. By bloody steps Britain had gained the Heights of Abraham—one of these steps in the long, hard climb had been over dead Braddock's dead army on the lonely Monongahela.

This vanishing of the Lilies from Quebec, Montreal, Niagara, and Louisburg was almost incredible of belief. And as the news permeated the farthest corners of the Thirteen Colonies it carried with it the glorious, heart-easing thought that never again would the troops of France go forth to battle in North America. It marked the end of an epoch. Only the Mississippi valley, from the Illinois to the Gulf, remained to France. Never could there be bonfires enough to celebrate the astounding victory; no number of public prayers could express the people's unbounded joy.

For the first time in the history of the New World could American traders and settlers invade the practically unexploited country west of the Alleghanies and feel no menace from the north. No longer would the red man be a barrier to this westward expansion; for the support of France was ended. A most stupendous realization! The aborigines, formerly holding the balance of power between two mighty empires, were now reduced to the insignificance of other wild things; such as the bear and the wolf. Or, at least, so believed the happy Anglo-Saxon people east of the mountains.

Naturally this great joy could not erase the many sore memories of Indian aid to France; and having wrested a continent from King Louis, the colonies and mother-country were not keenly desirous of heaping any favors on the red men.

The traders, with the exception of such men as Sir William Johnson, George Croghan, Alexander Henry, looked on the original Americans as an encumbrance to be cleared away. Colonial missionary efforts were vapid, compared with the activities of the Jesuits.

Rum remained a leading article of trade; robbery, and often murder, were among the prices paid by the Indian for bartering with the provincials. Every garden planted at English fort or outpost was the forerunner

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of a permanent settlement; for the seaboard people, unlike the conquered French, would never be satisfied with trade alone.

France had deluged her red wards with gifts, a costly conciliation, yet far cheaper than the maintenance of standing armies in far-off places. Flushed with complete success Great Britain had no gold to waste in perpetuating any such sentimental nonsense when dealing with a race that Sir Jeffrey Amherst had pronounced to be, "more allied to the Brute than to the Human creation."

To finish the rosy picture the St. Lawrence settlers soon learned to welcome the shift in government. They could work and enjoy their farms without dreading the raids of a tax-collector. The days promised to be halcyon compared with the squeezing régime of a Bigot. No longer were their young men bustled away to serve in the army. To be sure there were a few people at Detroit, Michilimackinac, and at other posts in the hinterland, who were slow to realize they were no longer answerable to France.

These hoped to divert down the Mississippi the peltry trade that had gone up the St. Lawrence. Such isolated and dissatisfied centers were without a military background, and, together with the red men, could be ignored. Or so believed the English.

Sir William Johnson, whose firmness and kindness had won the lasting friendship of the most warlike red nation in North America, had a clearer vision, and he repeatedly warned the colonial authorities and the Lords of Trade of a new danger. His voice was smothered by the general exultation. Sir William knew that the loss of Canada, while a great blow to France, was an irreparable disaster to the Indians.

Where now was their protection from the land-grabbers, brutal traders, and rude squatters? Where now the laced coats and other gifts? Where now the stimulating roll of drums and the crashing salutes for the red chiefs eagerly visiting Montreal, Three Rivers, and Quebec? Where now the soothing flattery of a royal governor's hearty greeting, and his subjects' participation in the ceremonies and dances—all so dear to the heart of the red warrior?

In truth, the red man was up for sentence. He vaguely sensed his plight. He must bend to the ways of the English, or be exterminated. And never lived a people so opposed to the white man's conception of "civilization" as were the North American Indians. On the surface the native population at first appeared to be stunned; then came incidents which the wise might well have interpreted.

The Senecas, Keepers of the Western Door, the one tribe of the Six Nations Sir William could not hold in check, began stealing horses from the whites. Later it was learned they were sending out some bloody-belts. Merely savage spasms, inherent in the daily life of all Indians and but another proof they should be eliminated ruthlessly. So declared Sir Jeffrey Amherst, commander-in-chief of his Majesty's forces in North America.

The red man stood in the dock and awaited sentence while the huzzaing grew louder and rippled the entire length of the seaboard, while bonfires leaped higher and painted the sky over every hill-top the color of war-wampum.

In the spring of 1762 it was said that the Ohio Indians had learned bad manners from the Senecas and were sending out war-belts and red hatchets. But what harm could these distant tribes work against the winner of an empire? More victory fires, more public prayers, more cheers, and less thought for the red man in the dock.

Occasionally Englishmen were found murdered and scalped; but these were private enterprises and had no correlated significance, said Sir Jeffrey. It transpired that the Shawnees and Delawares held prisoners whom they refused to surrender—a bit of savage stubbornness, based on ignorance and to be expected of those "allied to the Brute creation."

As an antidote for this annoyance Sir Jeffrey ordered that no presents be given the offenders until they showed repentance and reformed. The culprits replied by stealing more horses and killing more colonists. Croghan warned the commander-in-chief against "distressing them too much." Sir William once more raised his voice. Amherst replied—

"It is not in the power of the Indians to effect anything of consequence."

Suddenly the savage in the dock decided he would not serve the sentence imposed upon him. In the North the war-belts were circulated rapidly and traveled far. The motives behind the general uprising were threefold.

Among the Lake Indians was an undying

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hostility toward the English, an ancient friendship for France, and a desire for plunder. With the Senecas, the Delawares, the Shawnees, and other Ohio tribes, the motive was even more impelling—the tribes' fear of losing their lands. And, as history ever reveals, those who fought for their homes were the first to pick up the red ax; and they continued to wield it after their northern allies wearied of what they called "The Beaver War" and made peace.

In the Spring of 1763 a war chief, whose memory will be preserved so long as history is written, stalked into leadership; and the blind man at the head of the army, and the colonies as a mass, awoke to the realization of the one consistent purpose running through all the various outbreaks—that they had one, Pontiac, to reckon with. And there ensued a carnage of blood and a welter of suffering that was to cost more white lives before the end of the year than the colonies lost in 1759, when Quebec was taken.

CHAPTER I

ALONG THE RED ROAD

DOWN the Alleghany in a stolen Indian canoe the two forest runners had traveled; then a dash to the east to pass through the dangerous broken country around the head of Turtle creek. And there was never an hour they did not sense the proximity of Delawares and Shawnees. The white men came from Sandusky and were making every effort to carry their sad news to Colonel Henry Bouquet.

One of the runners scarcely typed the woodsman; for he was too short and stout, a roly-poly sort of a fellow. So far as physical appearances went he should have been the keeper of some eastern hostel, or a farmer. He carried his hat in his hand as he bounced along, and his head was destitute of all hair and glistened with sweat. Yet Enoch Meekly had a father and two brothers to avenge, and men of the border seldom met his equal at running or fighting.

His spirit was indomitable; he might be killed but never conquered. His round, whimsical face was more dreaded by the Ohio Indians than many a fiercer countenance. All day he and Jarvis Ballou had raced through the forest until his short legs made Ballou's long limbs plead for a rest. But there could be no loitering along this, the old road cut in 1758 for Forbes's army by Colonel Bouquet.

It was rough faring. For five years the rains had busily gullied the rude army path, and long since had the bridges over stream and swamp been washed away. Ballou had looked for a fight at the crossing of Turtle creek, but was most happily disappointed. Yet red death was abreast of them on that hot June day; and never thereafter did either smell the reek of rotting swamp vegetation without recalling that flight across western Pennsylvania in the Summer of 1763.

They could have taken refuge in some hole, like wild animals, and have waited for night to furnish them with road-belts, if not for the urgency of their business. And God's pity be upon the frontier and the barrier towns of Shippensburg and Carlisle if Bouquet should not be at the end of their journeying! So the two held to their pace. Meekly bounded and bounced along, clearing fallen trees, laurel and pea-vines, as though held up by wings. Ballou moved with the stealthy stride of the savage.

They halted at a little run where Meekly stood guard while Ballou kneeled to drink; and Meekly panted—

"The blaze will burn from Sault Ste. Marie to Georgia."

Ballou finished gulping down mouthfuls of water, and, while his friend drank, savagely said—

"And old Amherst says it's only a bit of a raid."

"Brains among generals sent over here to boss us seem to be as scarce as hosses was at Detroit before Braddock's army was licked," puffed Meekly as he rose to his feet and picked up his long rifle.

As there were scarcely any horses at Detroit until after the fight on the Monongahela this observation could not be construed as a compliment to His Majesty's commanders-in-chief.

It was the second or third time during the day they had paused and had indulged in speech. Now they were off again, with Meekly in the lead. They came to a fresh trail crossing the ruined road but could not pause to examine it in detail. It came from the west, presumably from Fort Pitt. From the glance Ballou got of it he estimated the warriors numbered two score. Meekly shot back over his shoulder:

"Fifty strong at the least. Big band."

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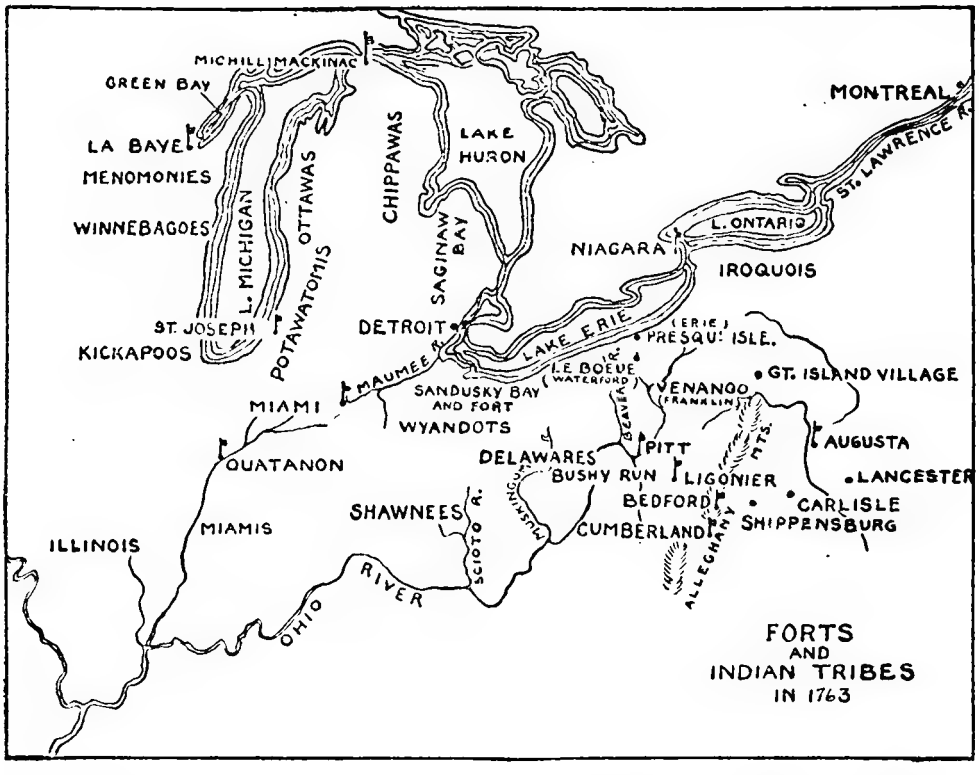
The runners had sacrificed caution for haste and had left signs behind them a border child might have read, and both knew that back of them somewhere lynx-eyed red men had noted their trail and already were in pursuit. Although they were hardened to woods travel and had spared themselves none both realized much had taken place in the North since their departure from Sandusky.

There was ever the fear in their minds that Detroit had fallen; that Pontiac of the and the general belief that the people were to enjoy a "still" time. The first ominous news from the West, received in early June, must have been like a clap of thunder on Sir Jeffrey's ears; for it compelled him to realize that a general rising of the red tide was threatening to engulf every white man west of Montreal and the Alleghanies. No longer could he ignore the danger and set it down to a spasmodic raid to avenge local grudges.

Meekly, lacking the intellectual back-



Ottawas, and accepted as leader by the Chippewas and Potawatomis—the Three Fires—had succeeded in taking the fort by some one of his numerous ruses. Trickery and assault at Detroit, and famine at Fort Pitt, had characterized the Indians' efforts to reduce these two strongholds. Sometime the colonies would learn the advantage of several strong posts, well garrisoned, over many small posts weakly defended. So they ran on, fighting against time and hoping to last until dusk.

Ballou recalled the great joy of the colonies when France was ousted from Canada, ground of his companion, devoted his thoughts to dealing with the next minute, the next problem.

The runners met the beginning of night when two miles from Bushy Run. Ballou dropped into a clump of hazel and whispered for his companion to keep on. But Meekly insisted:

"Two's better'n one. We'll keep together. We'll make the Marks place in a rush after we've coddled our wind a bit."

"Thank God, they and the Perkinses went back to the settlement in the Spring. Marks had no right to bring Nell out here."

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"He took her to Shippensburg. They're prob'ly in Carlisle by this time. He oughter take her to Philadelphia. I told him he was a fool to fetch her out here."

"Tremendous fool. But he's got that Quaker notion that by being kind he can keep friends with the red ——s. Might as well try to be friends with a rattler, or a copperhead."

"My old father felt the same way," muttered Meekly. "They killed him after eating the meat he'd set before them. Thank God, that Tom and Jim had a chance to die fighting and could take some of the heathen along with them!"

He fell into one of his brooding spells which mention of his father's tragic death always produced. Ballou had heard the full story from others; Meekly seldom mentioned any of the details. Three gone out of one family by red violence. Ballou could have named many families where the loss was much greater. To arouse his friend he observed—

"I didn't feel safe until I heard Nell was back in Shippensburg."

"You sorter shined up to her, didn't you?" mumbled Meekly. "When's the wedding to be?"

"Not so fast, old friend," And Ballou chuckled bashfully. "If I could have had my way it would have been before I started north. Truth is, Nell isn't quite ready yet to say how she is minded."

"Why, Jarvis, she'll be minded for you. "You're that proper set up and well known and liked."

Ballou flushed and muttered:

"I hope so most mortally. But Nell Marks has a mind of her own. There's nothing yet to show exactly how the wind blows. We've known and liked each other for years. Sometimes a woman gets so used to being a friend that she can't ever be anything else."

"That's witless talk!" scoffed Meekly. "It ain't likely a woman'll pass by some one she knows and likes to take up with a stranger."

"We'll hope you're right, Enoch. Anyway, thank God, she's behind the border. Chances are we'll find the Marks cabin burned and grown up to bushes if we're lucky enough to get that far."

"If we git that far? More boy's talk. You act like some one had 'witched you. What are we mousing around here for if it ain't to fresh our wind so we can make Carlisle? Our job's to find Bouquet. Nothing can stop us."

"——, old friend, but you're right. Nothing shall stop us. No, sir! All the Injuns 'twixt here and —— can't stop us."

"Now you're talking with belts," warmly approved Meekly. "We'll be shaking our legs. First there'll be the Perkinses' cabin; they went back with the Markses. Then the Markses' cabin. Then the Byerly cabin on Bushy Run where we can stop for another breather and a bite to eat. Then not much of nothing till we hit Ligonier. No chance of the Byerlys having stayed out here."

"No chance. Andrew Byerly is a man of sense."

"Well, I knew he and his woman are eddicated."

As they resumed their journey the gathering darkness made their pace slower and at times difficult. They kept to what was left of the Forbes road. In long stretches it was only a slash through the wilderness, a scant twelve feet in width at the best. Since the axmen chopped it out the vines and bushes had had time to encroach and in places had drawn a thin barrier completely across it. But if the messengers' speed was reduced, so, also, did night lessen any advantage heretofore possessed by the Indians because of their overwhelming numbers.

The white men would guard against every alien sound, whereas the savages, moving in scattered bands, must investigate each crackling dead branch, or run the risk of attacking friends.

THE road finally emerged from the thick growth and led through a thinly timbered country for several miles. Now the wayfarers could make out the bulk of the hills against the evening sky. In the far background the true forest, its ancient trees towering high, became a wall of ebony. Meekly suddenly exclaimed—

"That can't be the moon rising!"

Ballou stared ahead at the dim light showing above the woods and whispered—

"It's too near to be the Marks place."

"Then it must be the Perkinses' cabin," said Meekly. "Lucky for them they skinned out last May."

There could be no turning back for the messengers, however, even though a war band was ravaging the country ahead. They left the semblance of a road and took

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to the dark woods. After half a mile of cautious travel Meekly stopped and asked Ballou to listen; but the tall frontiersman already had caught it—the popping of several guns.

"That's bad!" whispered Meekly. "When guns shoot it means there's something to shoot at."

"Maybe they're firing at strayed cattle," hopefully suggested Ballou.

"Perkins and Marks got all their cattle back East. If there ain't been a new cabin put up that fire's at the Perkins place."

There was constant danger of blundering upon a war-party whichever direction they took; so with characteristic border daring they advanced toward the cause of the light. They came to a deadening, the girdled trees standing gaunt and stark but with no foliage to hinder the vision. Beyond this dead growth was a natural clearing.

Ballou halted behind a tree and stared at a gigantic red eye that seemed to blink and wink at him. It was the smoldering end of a log. He stole to the end of the deadening and beheld the smoking, glowing remains of the Perkinses' cabin.

The evening breeze shifted and blew the reek of smoke over the two men. They waited for some minutes. The savages had fired the cabin and had shot at something, and had passed on.

"Have your rifle ready," whispered Meekly. "I must know if there's anything there besides burning logs." Before Ballou could remonstrate the stocky-built figure was bent double and rapidly advancing toward the ruins. Ballou could catch vague glimpses of him flitting about like a dwarf. Then Meekly vanished. Ballou neither saw, nor heard, anything of him until his dark shape moved from behind a tree close by. In a voice that was filled with passion Meekly reported:

"Two men. Fresh scalped. One is Perkins. T'other is a stranger to me. Perkins must 'a' come back to look after his planting. Now the red ——s will be at the Marks place. But, thank it! they'll find that empty enough."

The burning of the Perkins cabin would give warning to the Byerly family should it still be on the Run. Ballou was confident that Marks had not returned, and yet his feet felt heavy, like those of an aged man, as he stealthily followed his friend along the edge of the road. Both men were startled by the sudden report of guns; and for the first time that day they heard the sound of voices other than their own. There was no mistaking those cruel yells, the savage exultation of red men cornering a victim. More shots disturbed the night.

With horrified gaze the forest-runners searched the eastern sky for the light which would tell of another blazing roof. With every step of their advance the cries of the Indians grew louder and clearer.

"Oh!" whimpered Meekly. "It's the Markses' place! The fool came back!"

"But only Marks and some men!" choked Ballou. "Even Steve Marks wouldn't fetch his girl out here a second time."

"Course not. Just men to tend to the crops. He'd never fetch the girl."

"God! They've done it!" groaned Ballou as a broad light sprang up ahead.

"Wait! Wait a minute!" gasped Meekly, yet not meaning for his companion to halt. "It's —— work, but the light ain't bunched together enough to be the cabin."

Even to the frantic lover the truth of this statement was obvious. The light was too thin and covered too great an area to emanate from a burning cabin. It was more like a grass fire. They left the road and passed through the intervening growth and at last crouched at the edge of the Marks clearing and understood. The savages had fired the fence surrounding a cornfield, and the flames were stealing in weird zigzag patterns around the plot.

The side next to the cabin was blazing from top to bottom and caused the house to stand out in bold relief. As the two friends watched they saw a man thrust his head and shoulders through the roof and dash a bucket of water over a patch of fire. A crescendo of gun-fire greeted his appearance; but, unhurt, he took his time and emptied another bucket over a second red patch.

Several shots were fired from the cabin. Neither of the runners could glimpse the enemy. There came the sound of white men's voices angrily disputing inside the cabin. A head filled the hole in the roof, but it did not belong to the fire-fighter.

"Oh, Lord! It's Steve Marks!" murmured Meekly.

Ballou thought his heart would pound through his ribs.

Marks began shouting in the Delaware tongue, calling for silence and attention.

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The forest continued quiet and the wrangling inside the cabin ceased. Marks called the hidden savages "brothers," and reminded them he was their old friend, that they could not harm a friend, nor the friends of a friend.

"The —— fool!" groaned Meekly.

"Hush! This is worse," hissed Ballou.

For Marks was now asking—

"Is my red brother, Tamaque, chief of the Turkey tribe of the Leni-lenape, out there?"

There was a minute of tense silence; then a deep voice answered:

"The chief of the Unalachtigo is here. What has my white brother to say to him?"

"He says that he is sad at heart to find a friend shooting guns at the house of a friend," replied Marks.

Another pause, and then the war-chief of the southernmost division of the Delawares was explaining—

"The Unalachtigo always have empty hands when they meet their white brother. They heard he was back among the white people. They believed bad men were using his cabin."

"Only Tamaque's friend and other friends of the Delawares are here."

"Tamaque's heart is glad to hear it. His young men told him that white men with Leni-lenape scalps were in the cabin. If there is no Leni-lenape hair in the cabin Tamaque has no quarrel with his white friend's friends."

With great pride Marks called down to those in the cabin:

"There! Didn't I tell you so? The chief says if there isn't any Delaware scalps in here they won't harm us."

"Tell him from me I'll stay here till I burn or rot before giving him a chance to look us over," bawled back a hoarse voice.

"Hance Whit, those are not the words to repeat to a friend of mine," rebuked Marks.

"Ask him what they did at the Perkins cabin?" called another voice.

But now the war-chief spoke up, calling out:

"Let our white friends leave the cabin. They will find our hands empty. One of our young men shall go back and look in the cabin. If no scalps are found the Leni-lenape will go away."

Marks sorrowfully explained:

"My white brothers are timid. They do not know the good heart of Tamaque as I do. They refuse to come out. Send a young man in. He shall not be harmed. He shall look about and see we have no scalps."

There was a considerable pause. then Tamaque countered:

"Evil birds whisper in my young men's ears. They do not like to go into the cabin unless a white man comes first to us. Let our old friend come and smoke with us while our young man goes to the cabin. Our white brother's mat is ready."

"The poor fool's grave should be ready," growled Meekly, twisting and striving to locate Tamaque, or King Beaver as he was called by the English. He was a brother of Shingass, another border-scourge, and one of the most relentless and cruel foes ever to raid the Pennsylvania frontier. He was friendly to the English until after Braddock's defeat, when he allied himself and his ferocious followers to the French.

"If my white brother's heart is clean let him come and meet his old friends while we send a man into the cabin," urged the chief.

"He's mad! Don't let him out!" some one in the cabin yelled.

Others cried much the same thing. The hidden watchers breathed in relief; Marks would not be allowed to go to the Indians. Then Marks began drawing himself up through the hole. Howls of warning and anger greeted this maneuver. A hand shot through the hole to catch at his foot and drag him back. But the foolish man adroitly avoided the groping hand and began working down the roof. Hance Whit popped into sight and leaned far forward in a second attempt to seize Marks; but again the latter was too quick for him, and with a final effort reached the edge of the roof and lightly dropped to the ground.

"Let our white brother come to us and be not afraid," encouraged the deep voice of Tamaque.

"Come back, you fool!" Whit shouted from the roof. "Duck back to the door. We've pulled the bar!"

Marks waved his hand as if gesturing for his friends to cease their pleadings and commenced to walk toward the forest. His course took him farther away from Meekly and Ballou, but the flames along the fence brightly illuminated his path. As he advanced he called out:

"No Leni-lenape, nor Shawnee, nor any other red man, ever called at Marks' door

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and went away hungry. No hunter ever called in the Winter and was refused a place to spread his blanket before the fire."

"We know our white brother. Let his friends put down their guns and come out. They shall not be hurt," answered Tamaque.

"My friends are foolish men. They see shadows and are afraid. I come to show them the Leni-lenape are my friends," replied Marks, still advancing.

"Look out!" hissed Meekly.

His warning was mechanically uttered, as Marks was too distant to hear the low-spoken words. Ballou saw what Meekly saw and raised his rifle, then lowered it. A dark figure was detaching itself from behind a stump and crawling behind the doomed man. The light from the burning fence touched the assassin's ax and turned it to silver. Sharp cries of warning came from the cabin.

Marks suddenly halted and started to turn about. The Indian came to his feet and raised his ax. Three rifles were discharged from the cabin, and the savage pitched forward on his face, shot through and through. The instinct to kill was all powerful and the ax was buried deep in the ground. With a little cry Marks started to retreat. A gun spat flame from the edge of the woods. Marks jumped convulsively, then began running with incredible swiftness, but not toward the cabin. He made directly toward the hiding-place of the two forest-rangers.

Neither of the men ever forgot the ghastly expression of the man's face, as with head thrown back and his eyes wide open, he raced by the corner of the corn-field. None started in open pursuit for fear of the guns in the cabin; nor were any more shots fired from the woods as the man was hopelessly trapped, every stride taking him farther from his madly shouting friends.

"Turn and come back!" howled Hance Whit.

But Marks kept on, running like one bedeviled. When he was within ten feet of the crouching men he dropped as if hit with an ax. He fell on his face, with the light from the burning fence playing over him. A dark stain on the back of his linsey-woolsey shirt told where he had received a mortal wound the moment he started to return to the cabin. After being shot he had convulsively responded to the instinct of self-preservation by running blindly; and he had died while he ran.

Meekly gave a low "*h-s-s-s*" as a figure came through the bushes to secure the scalp. The men in the cabin were waiting for such a maneuver, and a rifle bullet *snicked* into a tree close to the Indian. Guttural voices gave advice to the scalp-seeker. Tamaque directed—

"Let Slow Walker throw a strip of rawhide around the dead man and drag him into the woods."

Marks' body was within five feet of cover, but that narrow distance became as wide as the domain of death so long as the burning fence lighted it. The keen-eyed riflemen in the cabin asked for no more than a flicker of motion for them to keep the remains from being disturbed. A coil of hide rope shot from the bushes and fell on the prostrate figure but failed to catch.

Tamaque ordered his men to fall back and crouch low to escape the bullets. The instant the cord began to recede it was chased by two bullets. Slow Walker had expected this attack and had remained behind a tree while withdrawing his rope. Another cast was made and the loop settled over the dead man's foot. Ballou reached out to nudge Meekly and discovered his friend was gone. The cord tightened as the Indian, lying flat, pulled on the end after passing it around a tree. There came a slow, scuffling sound, followed by a faint cough. Then Meekly was back at Ballou's side and whispering—

"Run like —— around the field!"

"Let the Slow Walker come back and let the Thin Wolf try with the rawhide," called out Tamaque. And there were soft sounds as Thin Wolf approached to test his skill.

The forest-rangers knew their start was limited to the few moments it would require the Wolf to reach the spot where Slow Walker had died. As noiselessly as the smoke blowing from the fence the friends stole away. They had gained a lead of ten rods before a howl from the Wolf announced his discovery of the dead warrior. And he cried—

"The ghost of the dead white man has killed the Slow Walker."

"Spread out! Spread out! Look sharp!" bellowed Tamaque's angry voice. "A white man has left the cabin and is in the woods. Watch the cabin to shoot if he goes back.

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Spread out! Have the eyes of the owl."

Meekly sounded a shrill, quavering cry and changed his course so as to pass by the end of the cabin. Howls of rage from the Indians answered his defiance.

"You've stirred them up," said Ballou as they sped along just within cover.

From the hole in the cabin roof a man shouted—

"Ain't that Enoch Meekly's war-hoot?"

"Meekly and Ballou. Come through the roof and take to the woods in a bunch. They'll get you in the morning if you stay."

"We're coming. They got Nell Marks."

"Good God! He fetched her back!" babbled Ballou.

Meekly clutched his arm and began dragging him east of the cabin. Ballou's intelligence was frozen in the one thought: The savages had captured Nell Marks. This unexpected announcement, shouted from the roof, paralyzed his mind for the time, else Meekly could not have induced him to continue his flight. That Marks and some friends had come back from the settlements, and had "forted" themselves in the cabin while trying to save some of the crops, was not surprizing. Settlers were daily running as great risks that they might hoe straggling patches of corn. But that a man should bring his daughter back to the red country was unthinkable.

Stupefied, his benumbed faculties striving to deal with the horrible fact, Ballou followed his old friend. He had known Nell Marks for years, and had loved her as a lad when Braddock was marching from Will's creek to find a lonely grave. Now the girl was snatched away.

"They've got the girl! They've got Nell!" mumbled Ballou when he found his tongue.

"Keep yer trap shet!" hissed Meekly. "Want 'em to git you so you can't git her clear of 'em?"

This remonstrance furnished the necessary mental jolt. Ballou's mind began to function. He realized that, in all probability, the girl was being held a prisoner. His senses once more became objective and he shook off Meekly's hand, and he no longer walked blindly, but picked his steps with care.

"Got hold of yourself ag'in?" anxiously queried Meekly.

"I'm as right as I ever shall be till Nell comes back," he replied.

THE forest around the cabin was strangely silent, but Meekly knew it would be a man's work to cut through the eastern segment of the circle enclosing the cabin. It was very dark under the trees and the two kept close together so there might not be any mistaking each other for a foe. Having passed some distance beyond the cabin Meekly swung back to the Forbes road and halted near the edge. A slight rustling up the road caused them to squat on their heels.

The noise was repeated, as men running rapidly and softly encountered bush growth; and several shadowy figures glided by the white men. The circle was contracting, and the warriors stationed east of the cabin were eagerly pressing in to the clearing. An owl hooted mournfully in the north. It was answered in the south and west. A warrior in the road repeated the *hoo-hoohoo*. Thus was Tamaque, chief of the Turkey band of the Delawares, informed that his circle of death still held and that no white men had escaped from it. Meekly clutched Ballou's knee. He believed they were outside the circle. There remained only the danger of a hot pursuit and the chance of encountering some isolated scouting party.

And the men in the cabin were also cunning in Indian ways. Generations of butchery had taught them. None of the defenders had missed the significance of the signals; and they had waited for the fire of the burning fence to die down a bit. A great clamor and the banging of many guns broke the quiet of the starry night. From all points rose fierce howls of the Indians, and they could be heard crashing through the timber to head off an escape from the cabin. Meekly whispered:

"Fellers in the cabin are busting through the roof. Some oughter git clear."

Hoarse shouts of white men were now added to the infernal chorus, the compelling voice of the Anglo-Saxon cursing the enemy while defying him. The men were retreating along the road, and Meekly and Ballou gained the rough way and waited. A warrior, barely discernible, came running down the road from the east, one of the last of the cordon to reach the scene of the fighting. As Ballou drew his ax the warrior sounded his war-whoop, to inform his red brothers he was holding the road. Ballou rose on one knee and hurled the ax at a distance of fifteen feet, the keen edge striking through

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flesh and bone with handle down. The savage dropped and gave a convulsive kick. Ballou leaped forward to recover his weapon. Meekly shouted:

"Stick to the road, boys Keep together. Don't shoot us for Injuns. We've just bagged one." Then Ballou's stentorian voice was lifted in a scalp-yell.

Now Hance Whit could be heard directing:

"Give 'em ——, boys! Give 'em ——!"

His companions, knowing the two veteran woodsmen were waiting to cover their retreat, began letting off their guns, but not in volleys. Two or three of the rearmost would fire and then rapidly fall back to take the lead while reloading. When their pieces were ready again a sharp yelp would tell as much to those behind. This would be the signal for two or three more flashes and another swift shift to leave fresh rifles in the rear. This style of retreating, while doing but slight, if any, injury to a foe always fighting from cover, served to restrain the savages from making an overwhelming rush. Some of the guns in the road were always loaded.

One of the men, puffing and panting from excitement rather than from his exertions, came to a halt within a few feet of the two woodsmen. Meekly called out:

"We're white! Don't shoot!"

With a hysterical howl the fellow whirled about, his muscles reacting to the sudden alarm before his brain could understand the four words. Before he could obey instinct and shoot Meekly was upon him and shaking him violently and growling:

"We're white, —— you! Quit it!"

"——, Enoch! That you?" he groaned. "They've got the gal."

"Shut up! Be a man. They won't harm her. You're Rickards, ain't you? I thought I knew that crazy voice. Don't you go and shoot any of the boys down the road." Then he raised his voice and shouted: "Hance Whit, fall back on the run! We'll cover you. Meekly, Ballou, and Rickards."

Whit's men fired four shots and then ran their best to get behind the loaded rifles. Keeping up a continuous howling in hope of throwing the whites into a panic the Indians ranged through the woods in an endeavor to get abreast of their victims. The first figure to reach Meekly halted and clapped a hand on the shoulder of each man that passed him. Then he cried out—

"Six of us, counting myself. Who's missing?"

The men quickly gave their names, and Hance Whit announced:

"It's Glottman. They got him when we broke from the cabin. Eight of us here in all. Four to each side of the road. The two in advance hold their fire. Two rear men run to the front after shooting."

There was no more talking as the men took their positions and resumed their flight. The Indians ceased their howling and resorted to animal cunning and stealth. Ballou resented Whit's assumption of leadership, believing his companion should be directing their movements. He and Meekly were the rearmost men, one to each side of the road. It was impossible to distinguish a man from a tree even at a distance of a few feet. The white men bent low and ran at a steady trot. The Indians were forced to fire at sounds; the whites fired when a gun flashed from the border of the road. The pursuers were bending every energy to get ahead of the fugitives, but were finding this a most difficult thing to do because of the superiority of the road—rough though it was—over the encumbered forest floor.

Ballou heard a sound close to his side of the road and chanced a shot. A red man grunted in pain. Meekly fired a few seconds later, and the two ran to the head of the line, reloading by the sense of touch alone. As Ballou rammed home the greased patch and small bullet he heard his friend strike his gun smartly to shake some powder into the pan. There were but few men who could recharge a piece with the quickness of Enoch Meekly. The man directly behind Ballou gave a strangled cry, and there followed the sounds of heavy bodies floundering about in the bushes.

"Take my gun!" cried Meekly, dropping his rifle and diving into the bushes before Ballou could make an attempt at rescue.

An Indian began his shrill scalp-cry, ceased abruptly; and a raucous white voice announced a coup. In less than a minute from the time he dropped his rifle Meekly was back in the road and shouting:

"We've lost a man. I got his killer. Don't run close to the bushes."

"Names!" shouted Hance Whit, and he gave his own. The roll-call was quickly finished and the leader called out: "Pollard's gone. Hold steady. We're near the Byerly cabin."

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Ballou called out to Whit to lead the way with his four companions on the run.

"Meekly and me will fetch up the rear," he added.

Whit, half crazed over the capture of the Marks girl, profanely replied he would not run away and emphatically informed Ballou that a Whit was as good as any man alive when it came to standing off Injuns. Ballou was in no mood to try persuasion, for the iron was in his own soul and he little cared whether the leader speeded up the retreat or held it back. He had made the suggestion because his great experience in woods fighting had demanded it of him.

Some of the men should reach the cabin and be ready to cover the retreat of the others instead of all approaching it in a body with the savages at their heels. Ballou had no friendly feeling for Hance Whit. For two years Whit had persisted in addressing his attentions to the girl. Ballou had known her and loved her from boyhood.

The retreat continued at the former steady pace, the white men moving too rapidly for the Indians to draw ahead and block the way. The savages endeavored to rake the road lengthwise so as to avoid shooting across it and hitting their own men. To do this it was necessary for a warrior to approach to the very edge of the road.

One of the men began groaning most dolefully. Whit, now at the head of the little band, called out:

"What's the rumpus? Any one hurt?"

"It's Peters. I'm down," gasped the unfortunate fellow.

Ballou and Meekly fell back and came up to him and tried to pick him up. But he pushed their hands aside and faintly cried:

"Through the chest. I'm going fast. Git ahead! Git ahead!"

"Take his legs!" snapped Meekly.

Ballou bent over to do this, but Peters gave a flop and became very still. Ballou believed another bullet from the woods, fired at random, had found the wounded man. But Meekly swept his hand over the silent figure and whispered:

"A brave man! Done for himself with his knife so's not to hold us back."

Ballou picked up the dead man's rifle and unfastened the bullet pouch and powder-horn. Three indistinct forms leaped from the woods. Meekly discharged his rifle point-blank. The flash lighted up a grotesquely painted face. Ballou swung Peters' rifle and broke the stock over a Delaware's head. The third man dived headlong into the bushes. Meekly sounded his war-cry and the two scalps were torn off and thrown down beside the dead white man.

"They'll help pay for Peters' hair," panted Meekly.

"What's holding you fellers back?" snarled Whit, running down the road.

"Turn back! Turn back!" warned Meekly. "Peters has pegged out. Two Injuns went along to keep him company. Race for the cabin! They're gitting more bumptious. Once the growth thins out they'll git ahead of us."

The others heard him and took to their heels. Whit, swearing violently, vowed he would face the whole Delaware nation alone. Meekly wrathfully exploded:

"Stick back then! Git all the men killed. Git us all killed so there'll be no one to go after Nell Marks."

"Foller me, Ballou! We'll charge 'em if you dare," challenged Whit, rage overwhelming reason.

"You go, Whit. I'll make for the cabin and try for the girl."

"—— you! That trick won't work. You'd like me out the way. I'll cut your heart out some day!"

And he turned and ran swiftly up the road, Meekly and Ballou keeping at his heels.

The savages howled in triumph on finding Peters' body. They quickly changed to a lugubrious wailing as they stumbled over their own dead. Those deeper in the woods slackened their pace as they heard the yelling; and by the time they renewed the pursuit the whites believed they had increased their lead sufficiently to permit their gaining the cabin. The Byerly home was midway between Fort Pitt and Fort Ligonier on the bank of Bushy Run.

The starlight increased as the woods thinned, and the man in the lead cried out—

"Cabin's dead ahead!"

SOON all could make it out, a long, low structure, a smudge of an outline standing in shadowy relief against the black mass of the low hills and woods beyond. Whit by this time had regained control of himself and by a spurt of speed was the first to reach the door. He yanked down on the latch-string and then

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stood aside and counted the men as they entered. When his hand rested on Ballou's shoulder it became a fist, and Ballou knew a jealousy was at work which was so savage in its intensity that even their common danger, or the plight of the unfortunate girl, could not subdue it.

Danger is relative. There were sighs and groans of content as the men found themselves once more behind stout walls. They had lost one man in breaking from the Marks cabin, as strong a defense as this; and now, although no more securely housed and at any moment might be wishing themselves out in the open, they bore themselves as though they had been saved. Whit, when he could control his fearful temper, was a born commander.

Under his terse directions the four sides of the long room were manned. Two of Byerly's guns were found, also a quantity of powder and lead. A man was detailed to keep the extra guns loaded, and to convenience him in his work Whit would have started a blaze in the fireplace had not Meekly discovered live coals beneath the ashes.

"The Byerlys can't be more'n a few hours away from here," he announced. "And they've got three little younkers."

"Four," harshly corrected Whit. "There's a baby, not more'n two days old. Well, the younkers settle it for us. We stick here as long as a man can kick a foot and hold the varmints back. They won't know the Byerlys have lit out. Anybody see anything?"

"'Pears like something is moving across the clearing, but my eyes may be playing tricks on me," spoke up a settler named Posson.

"Where? Let me take a peek." Whit stared through the loop-hole, then shoved his long rifle through and fired. A screech of pain delighted him. "Your eyes are all right, Posson; but you want to shoot and make sartain afterward."

Whit returned to the fireplace where Ballou was engaged in putting in a sharp flint, made from an Indian arrow-head. Whit squatted opposite him, the light revealing the lines of hate in the rugged face. He softly began:

"Be sure the patches be well greased. Be sure the necks of the bullets are cut off close and that they're well scraped. We won't have no time to unbreech a gun and plug out a foul hunk of lead after they've busted loose."

"I know my trade better than you do," snarled Ballou.

Whit ceased to be the commander and became the jealous rival. He glared malevolently at the dark profile. "I didn't take to what you said back in the road, Ballou," he whispered, his hand hovering over his ax.

"That's your business. I don't ask you to like what I say. Rather you wouldn't."

"I'm going to fetch Nell Marks back. After I do, see that your trail don't cut hers, or mine," whispered Whit.

"If I find her, and she'll have me, she'll be my wife. You can go to —— for all I care," retorted Ballou as he carefully smoothed a bullet with his hunting-knife.

"I'll cut your throat the minute she turns a eye on you," passionately declared Whit, his dark eyes showing red murder lights.

"First it was my heart; now it's my throat. You're talking a lot of stuff into your war belts that you can't back up," jeered Ballou.

"By ——! I'll begin to make good now!"

With a hoarse roar Meekly jumped between them, standing erect and lifting his clubbed rifle, while they remained crouching and ready for a spring, Whit with his ax out, Ballou with his knife ready.

"Now you two fools quit it!" gritted Meekly. "We've had more'n enough of it. After we git to the settlements you two can cut each other up and be ——! But any more war talk here and I'll bash both your heads."

Both men struggled to regain their self-control. Meekly continued.

"You two just leave your quarrelin' till we find out if we're to live through the night. Perhaps by that time, if you both are alive, you'll have sense enough to leave it till you can l'arn what the girl thinks about it. One of you is taking a heap for granted in this love business. Mebbe two of you are."

Posson snickered hysterically. Ballou snapped out:

"All right, Enoch. I'll not make any more fighting talk till we're out of this mess."

Whit took more time in mastering his hot mind. Finally he lifted his head and thrust his ax back in the belt and agreed:

"That's wampum talk. We'll both wait."

Ballou resumed his work of scraping the

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bullets and quietly asked Whit to explain how the girl was captured. With a deep groan Whit seated himself before the fire and said:

"Marks and Nell and Perkins and the rest of us come out together. I was ag'in Nell's coming, but she would foller her father. Everything was quiet till today—if it ain't past midnight already. It was Pollard's turn to go out on a scout. He come in this afternoon and said there wa'n't no signs. I got a notion he was skeered and hadn't scouted deep enough. So I sneaked out to make sure. All the way out here Marks was pooh-poohing the notion of any harm coming to him or his friends. Said the Injuns was his brothers.

"Kept saying he'd see we wa'n't hurt if we'd stick along with him. Course none of us believed any of that talk, but we kept along to look out for the girl. I never knew if Nell believed his peace talk or not. But she must 'a' believed what Pollard said about no Injuns being near; for while I was out scouting she went down the road to the Perkins cabin. I come pounding back to say the Injuns was close, a heap of them. I got the men in from their work and when we was going into the cabin I see a light in the direction of the Perkins place. Not till we was inside and had barred the door did I know Nell wasn't in there. It must 'a' driv' me light-headed.

"When I come to my senses four men was holding me down, and Perkins' cabin was ablaze. Posson was yelling that the Injuns was coming. Even then Marks believed he could sweeten the Injuns up, git the girl back and save our lives in the bargain—Well, another fool has paid the price for thinking soft. Poor Nell! I'd gone if they'd 'a' let me."

"She was taken prisoner. I don't think she'll be harmed. Not for a while, anyway," muttered Ballou. "Two men were at the Perkinses' cabin. Perkins and a stranger."

"Ruel Black was helping him."

"Both dead. But there was no signs of Nell. She'd been taken away."

"Then they must 'a' made her a prisoner." And Whit's somber eyes lighted with a flicker of hope. "And I'll fetch her back if I have to crawl into ——."

"Of course. Meekly and me are going after her when we get clear of this ring."

"Huh! All right. More the better. But after she's fotched back you'n me will have something to settle."

"I'll remember. But let's not fight till we get her back."

"Wampum talk. I give white belts till she's found."

A rifle cracked. Whit leaped to his feet and with an oath demanded to know who had fired. Meekly answered:

"Me. Feller dodging among the trees. We're surrounded."

The other men confirmed this statement.

Whit investigated the water supply and found two kettles filled to the brim. He swung himself up beside the fireplace and worked the sapling roof-stringers apart and called down for Ballou to find some kind of a pole and some cloth, and to tie the cloth to the end of the pole. Ballou soon found both. A volley of gun-fire ran around the clearing, the heavy balls from the trade-muskets plumping into the logs on all sides. The savages were well supplied with ammunition for they kept up their fire for more than half an hour. The defenders tried to count the guns, and estimated the savages to number at least two score.

The besiegers next essayed what the whites had been dreading, arrows tipped with burning pitch. Hance Whit assumed the duties of fire-fighter. Placing a kettle of water on the table he thrust his head and shoulders through the roof and after wetting his long mop in the water he calmly proceeded to erase each spot of flame. Several warriors, infuriated at this repetition of the defense at the Marks cabin, ventured to run in closer, but a well-directed fire sent them scuttling to cover, carrying a dead or severely wounded warrior. Twice they attempted to fire the cabin and then became quiet. Whit believed they were up to some new trick, but Meekly, remembering the trail he and Ballou had crossed, guessed the right of it. The band had been detached from the forces surrounding Fort Pitt to aid in attacking Fort Ligonier. It had traveled fast and already had fought the greater part of the night—a most unusual practice for red men. Now the warriors were resting.

Posson and Rickards were insistent in urging a break for the forest.

"We'll be trapped and roasted alive if we don't," said Rickards.

"We'll stick so long as we can kick a foot," growled Whit. "The Byerlys are ahead

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somewhere. Can't lead no Injuns along their trail."

Ballou was impatient to be on his way to the settlements, but as neither he nor Meekly had divulged the nature of the news they were carrying to Colonel Bouquet, and because of his reluctance to increase Mrs. Byerly's danger, he expressed no preference. Meekly was for remaining, declaring that further flight through the woods would mean death for some if not for all of them.

TWO men stood watch while the others slept. At the first lighting of the eastern sky Whit was awake and climbing up the log-notches at one side of the door, and reconnoitering the clearing through the crevice left for that purpose. He reported no signs of the enemy.

"Mebbe they've gone back to take another crack at Pitt," Rickards remarked.

"Mebbe your grandfather had wings," Whit grunted as he dropped to the floor.

To justify his sarcasm the fire-arrows began falling on and about the cabin. The arrows came in great numbers, evidencing an unusual preparation. While a dozen brands missed the cabin and harmlessly burned out on the ground fully as many more lodged on the roof. Whit was half through the hole in two jumps and using the long mop. His appearance had been looked for, and was greeted by a crashing volley. But as the savages did not dare show themselves and as the range was long, the bulk of the lead was wasted. Most of the bullets fell short as the enemy aimed point-blank. The white men held their fire, waiting for something to shoot at. A second volley quickly followed the first. It was more scattering and of a different timbre. The defenders came up on their toes.

"More Injuns come up to help t'others," groaned Rickards.

"Rifles; not muskets!" cried Ballou.

"Hear them hoots!" shouted Enoch Meekly, rolling his bald head excitedly. "It's white men making that hullabaloo! Hear them give the red skunks their needings!"

He would have thrown the door open but Rickards caught his arm and dragged him back, warning:

"Wait! It may be a trick!"

"Trick? We ain't fort soldiers even if you be," snarled Whit; and he pushed Rickards against the wall and opened the door.

As the men poured from the cabin into the sunshine and heard the loud shouts of the newcomers they knew that none but white men could curse and boast like that. And again came the thin crack of long rifles, heavy of build and small of bore, and shooting a bullet not much larger than a pea. The settlers spread out and ran for the sound of the shooting but before they could penetrate more than a few rods among the trees the Indians turned in headlong flight. Posson howled and aimed his rifle. Meekly knocked aside the barrel and saved the life of a ferocious looking fellow with his face painted half red and half black. He was garbed as a Shawnee warrior, but had blue eyes. Meekly knew he must be one of Colonel James Smith's rangers, all of whom attired and painted themselves after the Indian fashion.

"Thanky, neighbor," said the ranger with a wide grin. "Your friend's hot-headed. Injuns are running like rabbits. We made a good kill. I was sent up to see if the Byerlys was done for."

"They went off before we got here," said Ballou.

"We knew they had some one cooped up in the cabin. 'Lowed it must be the Byerlys. We got right up behind 'em. Cap'n Joe will be back soon."

Ballou counted eight dead warriors, six Delawares and two Shawnees. All had been scalped. Meekly and Whit scouted the woods for any wounded, but found none. After an hour the rangers began straggling into the opening. They reported four more enemy scalps and two of their own dead men as a result of the running fight. Their dead they brought back with them. Captain Joseph Dingly was the last of the band to enter the clearing. He was not over eighteen or nineteen years, yet he had the grave features of a man past middle age. He was curt of speech and seldom spoke except to give an order. His men had never seen him smile.

While a grave was being dug for the two rangers Ballou remarked to the man whom Posson tried to shoot—

"Your cap'n seems young to be leading graybeards."

"Lost all his fambly on the Juanita in Fifty-six. He was a little shaver then. Happened to be out after squirrels when the reds come down on the clearing. He is

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always remembering what they done to his folks. Don't seem to hanker for nothing but to cut new notches on his gun. He's got a likely looking long row of notches now. We heard firing last night and come up the Forbes road to look into it. Devil's work at Perkins. Found old Marks sculped at his burnt cabin. Buried him and hustled here to help the Byerlys."

Meekly told him what had happened.

"Woman captured, you say?" spoke up Captain Dingly, who had strolled near.

He stared coldly at Meekly. The latter nodded.

"Why aren't you out to rescue her?" sternly demanded the youthful leader.

Meekly mopped his bald head and replied:

"Me and my friend here, Jarvis Ballou, didn't know nothing about it till sometime after she was took. When we learned it we was breaking our necks to git clear of forty odd of the devils. We was chased into the Byerly cabin in the night; and we've been kept tol'rable busy ever since."

"Of course," muttered Dingly, his brooding expression deepening. "One can't find a trail in the night. Tamaque is cunning. He started her off for the Muskingum the minute he captured her. Or sent her north for Pontiac to use in trading for some of the chiefs held by Gladwin in the Detriot fort. Curse them all! Had a crack at Tamaque at Fort Pitt a week ago—and missed!"

He turned and ran his lowering gaze over the waiting men, sixteen of them, and tersely said—

"We've buried 'Lijah Reed and Tom Cullom. They both had blood marks to rub out. Who'll help cover their bodies with more dead Injuns so's to rub out their marks?"

Every naked bronzed arm shot into the air.

"Good! We'll carry their scores along till they're well settled. A white woman has been captured—Nell Marks, daughter of old crazy, peace-loving Steve Marks. We'll add nothing to our score along of Steve. For ten years he's been asking for what he got But they must pay heavy for taking the woman. Who's keen to cut extry notches for the woman?"

As one the rangers gave voice to a terrific scream, and this time each uplifted hand brandished a knife or ax.

"Bill Albertson seen a trail near the Perkins place. Had a squaw's foot in it. Speak up, Bill, and tell the cap'n," said a ranger.

Albertson, slow spoken and scowling of visage, grunted:

"Moccasin too small for a man. Might 'a' been the gal. Didn't bother to foller. Trail was a good twelve hours old."

"Nell Marks wore moccasins," Whit hoarsely informed them. "I'll cut in on that trail mighty sudden."

Captain Dingly coldly warned him:

"No scaring the game. You keep back with us, Whit."

"My life's my own," growled Whit; and he eyed the captain truculently.

"The girl's life ain't yours to throw away," was the stern reply. "You keep back with us. If you git ahead of us and scare the game the back of your head will stop a bullet. You other men ain't wanted in this except *you*." He pointed to Ballou.

Ballou knew his path of duty led to the east, that one man more or less could not help the girl's case. His heart, however, was on the trail of the small moccasin. Yet the news he was carrying to Bouquet would permit of no delay; for its prompt deliverance might mean the saving of many lives. All this flashed through his mind even as Dingly was pointing a finger at him. He took his place with the rangers and called out to Meekly:

"You know all I know. Find Colonel Bouquet and tell him, Enoch."

With a wild oath Meekly retorted:

"Cap'n Dingly, what do you mean by trying to keep me out of this? Think you can close the woods to me? By ——! there's Injuns enough for all and I'm going to git my share. I've got a blood mark to rub out as well as you have, three of 'em. A father and two brothers. You fellers hunt in a pack. I'll hunt alone."

"Enoch, you must carry the word back east," cried Ballou.

"Take it yourself. What I know is mostly second hand. And you've got the gift of talk. You make Bouquet see things. I'll double back and meet you at Ligonier or Bedford. You won't git beyond Carlisle."

Dingly motioned for Ballou to step aside. Apart from the curious men he put a few questions to the forest-runner. When Ballou had finished he said—

"We won't tell the men." Then walking back to the rangers he explained, "I'd like

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to have Ballou with us, but his trail goes east."

"I'll help find the girl," angrily persisted Ballou.

"Ballou, travel east," repeated Dingly. "Refuse at your peril." Less harshly he added: "You don't have to prove your courage. You'll have it harder going east with Injuns all around you than as if you was with us. We don't need you to save one girl. But Colonel Bouquet needs you sadly."

"For ——'s sake let's not waste no more time in pow-wowing!" begged Whit. "Put me on the trail. I'll fetch her back alone."

With bowed head the forest-runner walked across the clearing, followed by Posson, Rickards and one named Smiley. The rangers with the two recruits filed into the forest. Ballou paused before the cabin and gazed after them as they vanished under the trees. Then he noted something on the cabin door and approached to make it out. It was writing, done with a charred stick, left there by Mrs. Byerly for her husband, Andrew. It read:

Warned by Black Beaver the Indians are coming before morning. Making for Ligonier. Michael, Jacob afoot. Babies on horse with me. Will try to save cows. BEATRICE.

Michael was a mere lad. Jacob was three years old. One of the babies was two years, the other but three days old. After Ballou had read the message aloud Posson said:

"There's need of the rangers along the east trail. Sharp need of 'em. Five helpless lives. But in ——'s mercy why did the woman try to save the cows?"

The four men struck into the road on the run and soon were among the low hills. For several miles they ran closely bunched as they had but little fear of a surprize attack; as any savages in their neighborhood would be falling back to escape Dingly's rangers, or to lay an ambush for them. Tracks of the horse and the cows were occasionally noted, and at every bend in the rough road the four men feared they might come upon a horrible tragedy.

It seemed most improbable that Mrs. Byerly and her four little children could win through a country swarming with savages. For a month it had been impossible for an express to break through to Ligonier from Pitt. Mrs. Byerly was delicately reared and had been educated for the softer side of life, and yet she typed the best of the border women.

The trail of the cows soon vanished from the road as the animals took to the woods. Mile after mile was covered by Ballou and his companions with the traces of the horse still giving them courage to hope for the best. And as the four ran to succor the helpless family, or to avenge it, there was ever in the back of their minds the picture of a blazing fence and a dying man running at full speed, done to death because of his suicidal trust in red men at war; of a white girl being hurried to the Ohio country, or north to fierce Pontiac's village.

CHAPTER II

FLIGHT AND FIGHTING

WHEN five or six miles from the Byerly cabin the four whites were startled by a violent crashing in the undergrowth close by the road. Rickards and Smiley discharged their rifles before Ballou could caution them to reserve their fire. The noise continued and the men took to trees. Posson exclaimed—

"Must be a mighty strong Injun to kick up all that row."

It was entirely too much noise for a red man to make, whether wounded or in his death agony. Ballou slipped into the woods and came upon a cow fighting clear of a tangle of vines. He announced his discovery to his companions and advised them to join him and keep in the timber until satisfied that no straggling Indians were investigating the rifle fire. Keeping a few rods apart they traveled half a mile and came upon another cow. The animal *mooed* on beholding the men and would have followed them had they not driven her back. After another mile they were halted by the tinkling of a bell.

"——'s great marcy!" gasped Smiley. "The poor woman even started with a cow wearing a bell!"

As they advanced the bell gave off its mellow notes almost continuously. It was Posson who first became suspicious. He halted and gathered the others about him and whispered:

"I don't fancy that bell. It rings all the time; yet it always sounds in the same place. Cow standing still wouldn't keep ringing her

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bell. And if she was walking we'd hear her blundering about."

This was common-sense, a bit of shrewd thinking that the others should have indulged in. Ballou swung off to the left and Posson veered to the right.

Smiley and Rickards advanced slowly in the line they had been pursuing. The tinkling notes continued with brief lapses, much as if the cow were grazing. Only there was no feed in the deep woods.

For ten minutes Ballou stole swiftly along, the damp ground giving back no sound under his moccasins. Finally he found himself abreast of the bell and turned in toward it. When the ringing sounded very close he halted behind a tree and carefully reconnoitered.

He saw no cow, nor heard any sound of clumsy hoofs—only the ringing of the bell. He stared at the direction of the sound and at last was rewarded by a movement at the foot of a tree. The motion was repeated until the painted face of a Shawnee came into view. The savage slowly shifted his position until in full view of Ballou. He squatted on his heels, bow and arrows at his side, his musket in his right hand. The left hand held the bell. His head was cocked to one side to catch the sound of a victim approaching.

Ballou deduced two things: The Shawnee had discovered the white men coming, but was depending upon the ruse to count a coup. Ballou began lifting his rifle. The Shawnee's wood sense was that of a fox. For although Ballou made no noise and was so covered that he could not have been glimpsed, the Indian suddenly glared about in wild alarm, then dropped the bell and snatched up his bow and arrows and slipped behind the tree with incredible quickness. Ballou glared in helpless rage on finding his target gone.

He dropped to the ground and crawled along the side of a decaying log to outflank the fellow. At the end of the log was a thick fungus growth which he purposed to use as a cover. He gained a point where he expected to sight the warrior. The Indian had either fallen back behind another tree, or instinct had alarmed him into moving around the huge bole. Ballou now was worried that some of his companions would blunder into the trap, although the silence of the bell should have warned them to hold back. But Rickards and Smiley were settlers more than they were woodsmen.

He was deciding he must yell out a warning when a rifle cracked. His eyes opened wide as the Shawnee suddenly bolted around the tree into full view, took a few staggering steps and went down in a heap. Fearing some trick Ballou covered the silent form with his rifle and gave heed to the sound of stealthy feet approaching the spot. Then Posson's head was thrust around the tree. Without waiting to learn if there were other red men near, the settler proceeded to remove the scalp and brandish his long knife in silent exultation.

"You should have waited until you'd loaded your gun," Ballou softly called out.

At the first sound of Ballou's voice Posson lunged frantically for his empty rifle; then realized a friend was speaking, and grinned sheepishly as Ballou stepped into view.

"See if he's wearing any hair in his girdle," directed Ballou, who had no stomach for making the investigation.

"Nary a sculp," said Posson.

The other two men came up on the run. Posson lost his enthusiasm and said:

"The bell-cow drew Injuns here. Question is did they happen upon the Byerlys in coming to find the cow?"

"I don't think so," said Ballou. "We can't know for certain till we swing back to the road and look for her trail.

He cast about and found the cow shot through the neck with several arrows. The animal had been killed within a few hours, whereas the Byerlys had half a day's start. Nor was there any trace of the horse, or the two children afoot, in the woods. Hoping the mother had wisely allowed the cows to stray while she pushed on with her children the men bore back to the road. How thickly infested were the woods was proven by a faint cry as the men reached the road and entered it.

"Some of his friends has found his body," muttered Posson.

The tracks of the Byerly horse were soon picked up, and the white men now had a double problem—to escape and yet not to lead the Indians along the trail of the fleeing woman. If she had traveled all night and had managed to keep to the road she should by this time be close to the fort, about thirty miles distant from Bushy Run. But had she paused to rest the children, or because of her own exhaustion, she might not be more than a dozen miles from her cabin.

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The entire country west of Shippensburg was abandoned to the invaders. Acting with a unison of purpose greater than any ever before displayed by them, the red men were systematically striving to starve out those they could not kill. When a cabin was burned its garden-patch was destroyed and the scanty livestock killed. The effect of this thoroughness was already being felt. Philadelphia and other eastern centers already were busy raising funds to stave off hunger from the frontier.

Every town along the border was filled with refugees who must be fed. Ballou and his companions, prepared to fight a rear-guard action with the enemy, feared they might be forced to earn every mile of the way to Ligonier. It was a shameful fact that the Assembly had failed to provide anything approaching an adequate defense for the long border.

From the repeated signals sounded in the rear and on both sides of the road the four whites knew their trail had been found and was being followed. But the Indians were cautious. Their numbers might have been small, or they might have learned of Dingly's rangers arriving at Bushy Run. Whatever the cause they bore themselves as if fearing a trap. The men in the road trotted along at a steady pace, two men on each side. Posson and Ballou brought up the rear as they were more used to red warfare; and for two hours they saw no enemy, although the signals were sounded on each side of the road.

Rickards, who was on Ballou's side, was the first to suggest a halt and a breathing spell. He declared the Indians were far back in the forest. Ballou urged him to make the most of his strength and keep his heels at work.

"I don't believe they're within half a mile of the road," he grunted, slowing down to a walk and pausing to enjoy the sweet yet slight acid service-berries growing by a rivulet that cut across the road.

"Move on! Move on!" sharply directed Ballou as he came up to him. "The scalp-hunters are thick as spatter from the New York frontier to southern Virginia, and nowhere are they thicker than right in this section."

"I can tell by the sound of their hooting that they're 'way back in the woods," persisted Rickards, stuffing his mouth with berries.

"He either gits into motion or we leave him behind," wrathfully announced Posson, who was trying to keep abreast of Ballou. "He's holding the three of us back."

Rickards sullenly abandoned the berries and trotted ahead. But within half a mile he paused to snatch more of the berries. Greatly exasperated Ballou told him, "I'm willing to keep behind and give you first chance to get clear. But you must keep moving."

"You fellers are in a damp over the red critters," sneered Rickards. "There ain't any of 'em roundabouts. They've even quit their hooting."

"Because they're drawing in closer to the road," whispered Ballou. "Move on!"

"You ain't my boss. There ain't no reds nigh here. My feet feel sore. I'm going to take off my moccasins and ease 'em.'

"Are you crazy, man?" wrathfully upbraided Posson. "I tell you, Rickards, the rest of us are going to push on mighty smart. They're on both sides and behind us. There may be other bands ahead. If we've got a fight waiting for us up the road we don't want to make it with these others at our heels."

"They've give you fellers a damp. I'm going to rest my feet.

Posson harshly rebuked him for his obstinacy, yet speaking in a low voice. Rickards grew angry and became reckless of all danger.

"By ——, Ballou! He wants to git us all killed. Let's go and leave him!" cried Posson.

"Go and be ——!" retorted Rickards. "You'd better hyper along if you're skeered as all that."

Posson lifted his rifle to club him with the barrel. Ballou halted him, and thinking to shame the fellow said:

"We must carry him if he's tired, Posson. It's death to stay here."

Rickards laughed derisively and seated himself on a rock and bent over to untie his moccasin thong. Suddenly his body stiffened and his eyes became glazed with terror. Ballou glared at the undergrowth, thinking the man had discovered an Indian in ambush. Rickards remained in a stooping position, his hands resting on an ankle, his gaze focused on the ground directly in front of him. Ballou stepped behind him and looked over his shoulder. A rattlesnake was coiled within twelve inches of Rickard's right moccasin. The reptile

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sounded his rattles as Ballou discovered him. The evil head was upreared and within a foot of Rickards' face.

Ballou gestured his hand for Posson to remain quiet and began edging his rifle into position. Rickards remained rigid as if under a powerful spell, his eyes wide and bulging, his fingers still resting on the leather ankle-thong. The muzzle of the slowly moving rifle was about to clear his shoulder when the horrified man gave a choking cry and leaped to his feet. At the same instant the snake struck, the fangs catching on the fringed sleeve of the hunting shirt. With a shriek Rickards jerked his arm and dislodged the snake. It fell at Posson's feet; and while Posson smashed the wicked head with the butt of his rifle Ballou seized Rickards and endeavored to still his wild screaming.

"You're not hurt, you fool!" snarled Ballou. "Your flesh wasn't touched."

And he pushed back the wide sleeve to show there were no punctures on his arm.

Rickards screamed the louder and his eyes rolled with madness. He struggled to wrench himself from Ballou's grip. Growling an oath Posson lifted his gun to knock him down. With a violent jerk the unfortunate man broke clear, and, still yelling horribly, started on a swift run down the road toward the west and back into the arms of his pursuers. To give chase would mean death; and knowing his yells had attracted the attention of every Indian within hearing Ballou and Posson ran up the road to overtake the anxious Smiley.

"Three on us left!" panted Posson as he raced along at Ballou's side. "Only ——'s mercy will see even one of us inside of Ligonier."

As they ran they could hear the yells of Rickards. Traveling in opposite directions his mad voice rapidly grew fainter and fainter. When it was but a murmuring cry Posson remarked:

"Either he was right, and the Injuns had give up the chase, or else he's bust clean through 'em."

"Which won't help him any so long as he is behind them," sighed Ballou.

THEY overtook Smiley, whose legs were wabbly from fear. He believed Rickards had been taken captive by the Indians and was screaming because of torture. The three men came to a small clearing, through which flowed a tributary of Kiskiminetas creek. Across the stream were the charred ruins of a cabin, destroyed some time after Braddock's defeat; for blackberry bushes and other growth had had time to spring up and half conceal the burned logs. The men splashed through the stream eager to make the shelter of a grove of walnuts beyond the ruins. Smiley suddenly slowed his pace and hoarsely whispered:

"There's food for us! Turkey in the tan trough!"

Posson and Ballou halted and Smiley darted off to one side and toward a large trough sunk in the ground. It was fashioned from a tree-trunk and was such as was to be found close by almost every frontier cabin. From above the edge of the trough protruded feathers. These moved slightly as Smiley advanced.

Ballou had estimated Posson to be slow of wits, but something sounded an alarm inside his head before Ballou sensed any danger.

"Look out! Drop on your face!" he yelled.

Smiley did not seem to hear him; and the next moment a brawny arm darted into view, and a glittering wheel sped through the sunshine to split the head of the settler. Like a monstrous brown and red snake the savage went over the edge of the trough. Ballou fired and shot him through both hips. Posson's rifle was discharged two seconds later and caught him through the back of the head.

There was no time to bury poor Smiley, but Posson paused long enough to scalp the Indian. Doubtless the savage had been surprized while prowling around the clearing and had hoped to escape being seen. The edge of the trough was flush with the ground, and if not for the tips of the turkey feathers showing, none of the three would have suspected the man's presence.

As Posson and Ballou tore through the grove, anxious to enter the thick timber beyond they heard the yells of the Indians.

"Two on us left!" panted Posson.

"Three!" corrected Ballou. Posson heard it and shot his companion a questioning glance.

It was a white man's voice, yelling wildly. The red chorus suddenly ceased. Rickards still lived and had turned back toward the east, and he still howled like a madman.

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The fugitives were deep in the forest when a faint scalp-cry announced the savage's discovery of Smiley. Rickards' screaming came at intervals and more to the north. It was evident he was still at liberty.

Ballou and Posson had been afoot for more than six hours and had been traveling for the greater part of that period. They had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. For the last ten or twelve miles they had been too hard pressed to search for signs of the Byerly family, and now that they were within striking distance of Fort Ligonier they did not know whether the woman and her children had gained the fort, had strayed in the woods, had been killed or captured.

Both the men knew rest was imperative, and neither would confess it just yet to the other. They passed through a noble grove of white walnut and wearily mounted a slope to enter the gloomy aisles of ancient pines. Once they passed under the first somber arch twilight succeeded sunlight. The solitude caused them to speak in whispers on the rare occasions when they exchanged words. At last Posson gasped:

"Mighty soon I've got to squat and git my wind. I'm clean tuckered out."

Ballou, too, was nearly exhausted. He debated whether to use up his remaining strength in a final effort to reach the fort, or to halt and rest so that the last few miles might be covered quickly should the need arise.

"When we strike water and cover we'll stop," he faintly decided.

They crossed the top of the ridge and descended to where the pines gave way for bass-wood and sugar trees, finger-posts for the thirsty. Ground growth thickened in their downward path and they came to a rivulet. They greedily drank their fill and descended to the bottom of the ridge and halted on the bank of a creek and looked for a hiding-place.

A huge tree, tumbled down by the wind, invited them to seek refuge under its mighty mass of earth-covered roots. The roots, violently torn from the forest floor, furnished something of a roof. The bushes had thrived on the disturbed soil and grew tall and thick. Close by was the creek. Entering the growth with great care so as to leave no trail they penetrated to a small recess. After looking to their primings they settled down to rest. Insect life abounded and the mosquitoes soon found them. Their stealthy intrusion had failed to disturb the chattering of the squirrels. These impudent ones would give warning if a less cautious trespasser approached the creek. Posson tightened his belt and sucked in his lips as he greedily listened to the tree-folks.

Both men, half reclining, remained motionless, not even daring to slap at the rapacious mosquitoes and tiny black flies. With the red man's stoic patience they endured the torture of the pests. Posson touched Ballou gently and lifted his brows. A cock-turkey was gobbling near the barrier of bushes. Ballou frowned and shook his head and lifted a finger for his companion to wait. Ten minutes passed and the gobbling noise sounded to be on the edge of the bush-growth. Ballou drew his ax. Posson whispered:

"It ain't answered. Ain't a signal."

Ballou scowled for him to be silent.

Posson advanced his lips close to Ballou's ear and whispered:

"No Injun. Real turkey."

Ballou, however, would take no chances, although his stomach seemed to be sticking to his back-bone. Posson noiselessly surged forward to his knees and drew his ax, his eyes lurid with determination.

"Injun or no Injun I'm going to count coup," he murmured in Ballou's ear.

Ballou frowned and shook his head in vain. Posson was hungry. As he began working gently through the bushes Ballou picked up his rifle and made ready to sell his life at a dear price. The *gobble-gobble* now sounded along the edge of the growth, accompanied by the faint rustle of last year's dead leaves. With ax raised Posson advanced another foot. Inch by inch he worked under the low hanging foliage until only his moccasins were to be seen. For several minutes he did not appear to move a muscle. Ballou was wondering if he had discovered a savage and dared not retreat for fear of betraying himself, when there came a low expletive and a faint thud.

Then he was so silent that Ballou reached forward and touched his foot. Posson slowly backed into view, making a faint rustling sound despite all his caution. He was pulling after him a large turkey. He glared triumphantly at his companion. Ballou reached over and pawed at the bird

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anxiously. He was relieved by Posson softly whispering:

"With the flat of the ax. No blood to leave a mark."

The two quickly dressed out the turkey. Posson ate some of the meat raw. Ballou was not that hungry yet. After another two hours had passed he collected some dry sticks and kindled a tiny blaze that gave off scarcely any smoke. Over this he partly broiled some of the meat and bolted it in huge mouthfuls. Then he whispered:

"I'm ready if you are. We must make Ligonier before dark. Don't come with me if you'd rather stay here till night. But I must get through."

"You ain't no keener to be going then I be. I'd rather face Injuns then any more of these —— 'squitoes," Posson assured him.

They left their unique hiding-place and stole up the slope beyond the stream. They saw no Indians and very possibly they had been in no danger when they went into hiding. The sky was overcast and rain fell by the time they crossed the ridge. They were within three miles of the fort and devoutly hoped the rain would continue even should it make travel more arduous.

Wet weather worked havoc with exposed bow-strings and the pans of unprotected guns. They thrust the butts of their rifles inside their wide sleeves and pressed ahead. To their disgust the rain ceased and the sun burst through the clouds.

THE country seemed to be empty of Indians, and when they sighted the fort they relaxed their watchfulness somewhat. Ligonier was the last western fort until Pitt was reached, unless forts Miami on the Maumee, and Ouatanon on the Wabash be counted, both small posts and already captured by the Indians. It was of imperative importance to the colonies that Ligonier should withstand siege and assault; yet it was weakly garrisoned and its stockade was in a very poor condition.

It had been attacked several times, and it was quite miraculous that it had not fallen. Had the Indians left Fort Pitt by itself while they concentrated on Ligonier it might have been captured. With it reduced, and its military stores in the possession of the Indians, Pitt would have had the greatest difficulty in escaping destruction. The loss of Ligonier also would have left any relief force bound for Pitt without a base to work from. To succor the post at the forks of the Ohio it was necessary to keep the flag of Great Britain floating over both Ligonier and Bedford.

Men along the top of the stockade saw the two men approaching and began waving their hats. Posson waved back, but their gestures impressed Ballou as being too energetic for greetings. He thought he read in their repeated gestures a signal to be on his guard and to make more haste.

Posson laughed at this notion, and in his exuberance in having won through the red lines he lifted his voice in a loud yell. The next moment Indians broke cover on their left and were sweeping down on them, firing many arrows as they ran. The white men picked up their heels and made up for their loitering.

The few houses that had stood outside the fort were in ruins, fired by Lieutenant Blane, commander at Ligonier, to prevent the Indians using them for shelters when making an attack. Ballou and Posson slowed to a walk on discovering the Indians had given up the chase. Then the men lining the top of the stockade began waving their hats again and fired their guns. It was obvious they were not shooting at the savages at the edge of the forest, for the range was too great, nor had they any ammunition to waste.

"They're firing at the creek," warned Ballou and pointing to a bush-lined stream some four hundred yards from the fort. "Must be trying to tell us some of the Injuns are hiding there."

They broke into a run and swung out from the creek and promptly were saluted by a volley of bullets and arrows. Some of the Indians left cover and endeavored to head them off, but a stretch of swamp land was between the savages and their quarry, and in a few minutes the two had dashed through the gate and were stretched on the ground and filling their lungs with mighty inhalations.

Lieutenant Blane came up to them, carrying a long rifle. His thin face showed the great strain he had been under. His forces consisted of a small detachment of Royal Americans and a few woodsmen serving as volunteers.

"You are the Pitt express?" he eagerly asked as he dropped down beside us.

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"From the Norh. Sandusky. We have not been to Pitt," panted Ballou.

"Not an express through from Pitt since May thirtieth," he groaned. "It may have fallen!"

"I don't think so," said Ballou. "The Indians would be back there to share in the plunder and the scalps. The woods between here and the Alleghany are filled with the savages. They're blocking the road against any reenforcements."

"Ligonier must receive reenforcements soon," he sighed. "Or there'll be no halfway resting place on the road to Pitt."

He paused and cast a quick glance about to make sure none of his men would overhear him and lose heart, and murmured—

"You must have some news."

"Presqu' Isle, Le Bœuf, and Venango have fallen. That is the news I am taking to Bouquet. Not a soul escaped at Venango. Ensign Price and thirteen men escaped from Le Bœuf and found Venango in ruins and the garrison butchered. It's not known what tribe did the bloody work, but Price thinks it must be the Wyandottes, who captured Presqu' Isle and Le Bœuf. But Enoch Meekly, who saw the ruins with me, found bits of Indian finery he says belonged to the Senecas. Meekly was one of the Presqu' Isle garrison. The road from Lake Erie to Pitt is closed."

"That is bad news," he muttered. "Say nothing before the men. God knows we have enough to worry us as it is. Detroit still holds?"

"It was holding when I left the North. So long as Major Gladwin sticks close and keeps the river to his back Pontiac can't capture the place. Now please tell me about the Byerlys. We left Bushy Run some twelve hours after they came off."

"They're here, the six of them. Her husband overtook them on the road. She is in a sad condition and is in bed. Bullets chased them inside the stockade. They would be safer in Fort Pitt. I wish they were there or back East."

Posson was told to repeat nothing of what he had overheard. He announced his intention of biding at the fort rather than to risk the journey to Carlisle. He was turned over to one of the men to be fed. Ballou retired with Lieutenant Blane, and, after satisfying his appetite, was kept busy into the evening answering the officer's many questions. When Blane would have shown him to sleeping quarters Ballou replied—

"I must be off for Bedford and Carlisle."

"Of course. You will find Colonel Bouquet at Carlisle. I will send him a letter by you."

His report was soon written, and with it he brought a parcel of cooked meat and a bag of parched corn. "There's a timber loose in the stockade on the east side where the men slip out at night. God knows the whole works are loose enough so far as that goes! I will have the men feign a sally from the gate. Then you'll have to trust to the darkness and your heels."

He escorted Ballou to the east stockade, where an opening could be made quickly. He posted a man to make the point of egress secure after the forest-runner had passed through; and with good wishes and a shake of the hand returned to direct the sortie. The night was clear and the stars burned with more than their usual Summer brilliancy.

"You're good as dead," grumbled the man who was to replace the loose timber. "Last two fellers to try it come back with arrers hanging from 'em. One was most mortal hurt and we buried him just outside the fence."

"Thanks for your encouragement. But I shall not come back," grimly replied Ballou.

After a few minutes' wait he heard Lieutenant Blane's voice shouting commands, heard the gate swing open and the scuffling of feet as the men filed out.

"They'll pretend to make a drive toward the crick," moodily informed the man. "When they fire and get the red —— to shooting is the time for you to scoot. Wish you'd give me your ax."

His request was depressing as it evidenced a firm belief that Ballou would soon be beyond the need of lethal weapons. Obviously the fellow had noticed the ax when Ballou arrived at the fort. It was of French make, and decorated with diamonds and other devices likely to catch the savage eye, and its lines were more graceful than those of the business-like English ax.

"I've fetched this ax from the lakes. If you hanker for it you come along and pick it up when I'm through with it," growled Ballou.

A scattering volley ended this whispered conversation.

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"Our men shooting wild," muttered the man. Then came a heavier fire. "Injuns throwing their lead away. Our men won't git within range," he interpreted.

The loose timber was removed.

Ballou slipped through on all fours and in that position started for the forest. The firing at the front of the fort continued as he crawled among the few stumps not yet grubbed up. It died down as he passed the ruins of some cabins Blane had caused to be destroyed. His heart doubled its beat as he drew close to the silent woods and encountered the fringe of bush-growth. Not until in the forest proper, where the ground was unencumbered except for logs and dead branches, did he stand erect. He used a precious minute in listening. Silence stretched around the fort. Moving slowly and keeping away from the road he resumed his journey to the east.

Luck was good to him; and he traveled through the broken country of the Laurel Hill until daybreak without hearing any hostile sound. He hid in a thick clump of bushes and ate of the meat and corn and slept for several hours, his woods instinct telling him when to awake. His swollen face told him how royally the mosquitoes had feasted. He ate more of his rations and crept from cover.

Safety required that he travel only at night; the news he carried demanded the least possible delay. He emerged from the hilly country without arousing the cry of discovery. By noon he reached Stony Creek and was given a rare fright by the passing of a large body of savages—Delawares, Shawnees, Mingoes—traveling east. They passed close to him but had not cut his trail.

Ballou's schedule called for some fifteen miles additional of travel beyond the creek before making a camp at, or near, Shawnee Cabins. This town was established prior to the opening of the century and was visited by James Le Tort, the trader, as early as 1701. Before the Braddock war it was the favorite stopping place for traders bound for the Ohio.

Taking the trail left by the war-party Ballou passed through the mountains and made excellent time until within a mile of the Cabins, when he reconnoitered slowly to learn if the warriors had gone into camp at the deserted town, or had passed on. He was mildly surprized to find their trail swing wide of the old Shawnee village as though they desired to avoid it. Their objective was Fort Bedford and they were in great haste to make it, and yet they must camp somewhere, and the Cabins was the logical place.

AT DUSK he stole among the few remaining cabins, squalid structures long since deserted by the Shawnees, and cast about for a place to snatch a few hours of sleep. He received the scare of his life when he halted before a low door and found himself staring at a monstrous face framed in long black hair. The face was greatly out of proportion to the trunk and legs. After the first moment of stupefaction he leaped back and threw forward his rifle. A voice—ridicuously weak for such a grotesque head—remonstrated—

"Would the white man kill Black Beaver, one of the last of the Conestogas?"

Ballou hesitated and suspiciously answered—

"You speak with the tongue of the Leni-Lenape."

And he continued to marvel at the enormous head.

"Why speak the tongue of my people when nearly all of them are dead?" And he eliminated Ballou's bewilderment by removing the huge mask from his face. "We are of the Iroquois, and the Iroquois have killed nearly all of us. I have left our ancient home of Conestoga because I dreamed the white men would kill the rest of us. My dream told me to leave the Susquehanna."

"You warned the Byerly family on Bushy Run to leave the cabin?"

"The Byerly man and woman were good to me. I told them to run into the woods."

"A big war-party passed by here without stopping. Why was that?"

The Conestoga shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows? Perhaps the ghosts told them to pass by. Perhaps their Seneca scouts saw a big head."

"So that was it, eh?" muttered Ballou to himself. Then he asked, "Why do you have that thing?"

And he pointed to the wooden mask with its distorted lips, and the tongue hanging below the chin.

"Black Beaver dreamed he was a Ga-go-sa (False-face). He could not tell his dream to the woman-keeper of the False-faces, for there is no room for him in the

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Long House. This face is very powerful magic. A Mingo scout—a Seneca—looks on it and runs away. This face will help Black Beaver turn into a snake. Black Beaver has gone without eating for four days. His magic is ready to work for him."

"Poor ——," muttered Ballou.

And well might he commiserate the last of a brave people. Iroquoian by descent, his nation had been whittled down from three thousand to five hundred by the Long House—and now it scarcely numbered more than a score. With his people all but exterminated he had turned to the wicked gods of the Iroquois, and he had sought to propitiate the evil-spirits, known from most ancient times as the False-faces. Not yet had he dared venture into the Long House and seek entrance to the secret society known as the False-faces, and thereby secure the aid of the malevolent bodiless ghosts; but he had done the next best thing.

He had acquired, or had made, a "face" which already had served him well by insuring privacy at the Shawnee Cabins. His best recommendation in Ballou's mind, however, was his warning to the Byerlys.

Nearly two hundred years of pitiless warfare against the Conestogas had bred in Black Beaver the instinct to find a refuge. He had often observed how easily the snake slips through a crevice, or hides under rocks; and his plane of hope was so submerged that he finally welcomed the idea of becoming a serpent when danger nipped at his heels. And he was wise in leaving the white settlements, for the many raids by the Indians had worked up race-hatred to a homicidal pitch.

The time was very near when inoffensive Indians would not be distinguished from those bringing the red ax. Ballou lowered his rifle and brought forth what was left of the meat and corn, and said—

"Here is food for Black Beaver."

"The Beaver will remember the white man," muttered the Conestoga as he greedily grabbed at the meat.

In reaction to his first fright Ballou smiled. Then the lean arm of the Indian shot forward and clutched his arm, and the red man was warning:

"In here! Some one is coming!"

With the alarm sounded Ballou instinctively obeyed; and yet he had heard nothing. Not until after he had allowed himself to be drawn within the cabin did he hear the soft foot-falls. He took his position at one side of the low doorway, ax in hand. Black Beaver replaced his mask and stood opposite the white man. The steps approached along the side of the cabin and moved more slowly. Then a brawny figure shut off the faint light. Before Ballou could take the initiative Black Beaver thrust his head and false face into the opening. After a few moments of paralyzed fear the scout gave a yell and tumbled backward and took to his heels.

"It begins to work for the last of the Conestogas," muttered Black Beaver. "It has much magic."

"The Conestoga has paid me for the meat. Now I must go to Bedford."

"Wait. The False-faces whisper to me that many Mingoes, Shawnees, and Lenilenapes, are between the white man and Bedford; that many will be passing back this way before another sleep. The white man can wait."

"And be caught in a trap!"

"At night they will not come here. The man who ran away will tell how he saw the Ga-go-sa flying among the cabins. The white man can leave before the sun crawls from his blankets."

Ballou was very weary and he found wisdom in Black Beaver's words. Once it was known that these supernatural beings, the Ga-go-sa, sowers of pestilence, eaters of men, were lurking about the old Shawnee town, few and foolish would be the red men who trespassed there. Ballou decided to take his rest. Despite the wood-ticks he slept soundly that night. Before sunrise he was up and eating corn and meat.

When he was ready to depart and had announced his purpose Black Beaver requested him to wait for a minute while he consulted his medicine. Ballou, impatient to be off, tarried and the Conestoga whispered in the ear of the mask. Then he said:

"Very soon my magic will help me change into a snake. The white man must not kill a snake when he finds one as it may be Black Beaver. If the Beaver should be killed in the form of a snake he could not change back into the form of a Conestoga."

"I will remember," Ballou gravely promised. "But my red friend must not take the form of a rattlesnake, or a copperhead."

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"Wait," hissed Black Beaver. And he inclined his ear to the protruding lips of the mask. "The Ga-go-sa whisper that I shall go with the white man to Carlisle, where he will talk with another white man who tells soldiers what to do."

"Some trick!" muttered Ballou. "All right. Make ready. I travel fast and start at once."

Black Beaver required only a minute to wrap his blanket about the false-face and to tuck the remainder of the meat under his girdle. There were no signs of Indians to be found when they stole from the village.

They had advanced but a few miles, however, when they came to evidences of the Indians' activities. They passed a cabin, still smoking, with feathers thickly sprinkled over bushes and the ground. The raiders had found amusement in ripping open feather-beds and in scattering their contents before the wind. Yet they saw no Indians. Black Beaver was of the opinion that the red men had started for the Ohio, or the west branch of the Susquehanna, with prisoners.

The two held to the road and traveled rapidly. Soon they were turning aside to avoid two dead men. The scalp had been taken from the head of each. A few rods from the road were the embers of what had been a home. Every mile now duplicated these scenes; and there was the horror of knowing that similar fiendish work was going on in every valley and in every clearing within twenty miles of Fort Bedford.

How persistently the people had clung to their homes was revealed by these isolated massacres. And Ballou marveled. Earlier in the season all had responded to the first panic and had left their cabins and crops, and had hurried—a terrified mob—into Bedford. But after a brief spell of safety in the settlements their clearings had called to them, and they ventured back to meet a bloody death. Such sacrifice would prepare one to expect the able-bodied to band together and to risk all in attempting to drive the red man back. But so heavy did the shadow of Pontiac and his fierce allies lie on the land that all were paralyzed by terror.

There seemed to remain but one instinct—to flee. Ballou and Black Beaver found during their morning's journey through many ghastly scenes no place well fortified and defying the savages. Nor did they meet any scouting parties of woodsmen out to bury the dead. Like a blanket a blighting fear had dropped down on the land. So concerned was Ballou with his dismal thoughts that he forgot his own danger and was hastening ahead with scant attention to his surroundings when Black Beaver forcibly checked him.

He sought to shake off the detaining arm, then heard the firing of guns and was quick to follow his red companion's example in leaping from the road and taking to cover.

They were within a mile of the fort, and a stealthy reconnaissance revealed a tragedy in a hay-field. The field belonged to George Croghan, and in it fifteen haymakers were fighting for their lives against an onslaught of the savages. Black Beaver hurriedly unwrapped his wooden mask and consulted it. Ballou worked to the edge of the field without leaving cover. Two white men were down and done for by the time he parted the last fringe of bushes. One man, still carrying his scythe, was running toward Croghan's barn.

A savage suddenly rose up in front of him and immediately whirled around in a mad dance with the scythe protruding from his back. Another savage rose up and struck the white man with an ax and deftly scalped him and turned back to join in the fighting near the center of the field. Ballou was astounded to behold the scalped man struggling to his feet and run toward the barn. The Indian, who had counted coup, was waving his trophy as he ran.

Ballou took a long shot and saw him spin around, drop his scalp, and painfully limp toward the nearest cover. Then the savages bunched in the center of the field disintegrated and dispersed. Ballou glanced about for the cause and beheld Black Beaver, wearing the monstrous face, striding toward them. As the Indians retreated a brisk fire opened upon them from the woods across the field. Carrying several dead and wounded the Indians disappeared into the forest. The reenforcements consisted of six Royal Americans, and very martial they looked in their bright scarlet uniforms.

Black Beaver retreated to the woods and Ballou hastened to meet the soldiers and aid in getting the haymakers back to the fort. He spoke of the man in Croghan's barn. They found him hidden in the loft, dead.

Ballou warned them about his friend,

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Black Beaver, and then coaxed the Conestoga from his hiding-place. The soldiers lowered on the Indian but refrained from offering him any harm. The Conestoga walked apart, his small eyes keeping a wary watch on the white men.

"Where is Colonel Bouquet?" Ballou asked of a sergeant.

"He should be in Carlisle. He must come soon, or he won't find any of us alive at Bedford. Steady, men! Steady! You haymakers hurry ahead with the wounded. Don't bother that Injun. He's friendly. Give them a volley, lads."

The last to discourage an onrush of the Indians from the woods, for the weakness of the rescuing force was now apparent. The volley did no harm that Ballou could observe, and to prove the superiority of the rifle over the musket he knocked a man off a stump as he was waving a woman's dress as a flag.

"That's a good-shooting gun that you've got, stranger," barked the sergeant. "Suppose you try that trick again."

But by the time Ballou had reloaded there was not an Indian to be seen. With the haymakers leading the way, with Black Beaver hovering uncertainly behind them, the retreat to the fort was continued. Bedford was in even a worse condition than Ligonier. When the Royal Americans and Ballou had entered the gate, and the latter had made himself and his errand known, the commander, Captain Louis Ourry, a most likable and quaint fellow, nodded toward his Royal Americans and dryly informed the forest-runner:

"You can also report to Colonel Bouquet that you watched my garrison—six men—in action. Until yesterday they constituted my entire forces. Last night, owing to the murders on Denning creek, some hundred and fifty men and their women and children, flocked in upon me. In a few days they will all be gone back to their crops and cabins. Eighteen have been killed—within pistol-shot of the fort."

When he was told of the loss of the three northern forts his whimsical countenance looked old and worn for a minute.

"Don't mention it to any of the men," he ordered, practically repeating Lieutenant Blane's words. "They're in good spirits so far, even with the killings. But if the Indians ever grow discouraged about taking Pitt and concentrate here in large numbers we'll be destroyed as if this defense was made of straw. I am surprized every time an express gets through and announces that Ligonier still holds out. I am doubly surprized every time I review my garrison—sometimes as large as three sergeants and nine privates—and realize that Bedford hasn't been taken. Tonight I have a volunteer force of a hundred and fifty men. Inside of three days I may not have a backwoodsman inside the stockade. You'll be on your way soon?"

"As soon as I can eat and get a package of meat and bread."

"Both wants are soon filled," said Ourry.

He gave an order to one of the cooks and took Ballou around to inspect the fort. It was a miracle that white men still held the walls. Large sections of the stockade were in a most ruinous condition. In the presence of the settlers and regulars the captain jested and laughed and simulated a rare contempt for the red man. He was quick to disperse an angry group surrounding Black Beaver, and loud to warn all within the fort not to annoy the red man.

After the Conestoga and Ballou had eaten and had received their packages of meat and bread, the commander led them to the back of the stockade. He held Ballou's hand for a moment and all the laughter was absent from his face as he whispered:

"Tell Colonel Bouquet I'll hold out as long as I live. Good-by and good luck. Black Beaver, take good care of our white brother."

The Conestoga, flattered to be thus addressed, nodded his head grimly and significantly tapped the wooden mask concealed in his blanket.

"The Black Beaver has a mighty medicine. The white man shall take his belts to Carlisle," he assured him.

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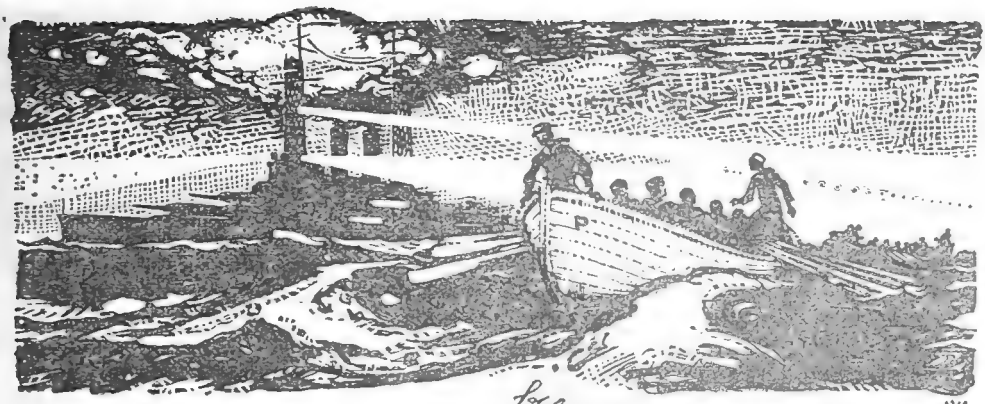

VENTY

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Monk Rides His Luck," "Fish for the Gunner," etc.

"BULL," as we called him, was a compound of bulldog, ox, bear, and jackass. He had the pugnacious jaw and vicious mouth of a bulldog; the squat, heavy-set frame of an ox. You heard his voice and you thought of the roaring bear in the zoo at feeding-time. The jackass? In his stubbornness.

"A fine compound to be captain of a battle-ship!" you say.

Well, it was so.

Bull was a fragmentary remnant, with a few fragmentary ideas, of the old wooden-ship-iron-men navy. And, despite the many changes which science and time had wrought in the Navy since his midshipman days, to those few fragmentary ideas Bull held, with all there was in him of bulldog and jackass.

Bull conceded that from wood to steel, in the matter of ships, was all very well—"But why wooden men?" he contended.

Because wooden wind-jammers had become things of antiquity, it did not follow, to Bull's mode of reasoning, that so should the iron men who had manned them become things of antiquity. Let steel dreadnoughts come and wooden square-riggers go—on his ship, there would always be iron men.

When Bull bellowed "Come heah!" at a man, what he actually meant was "Be here!" The few seconds it took the one summoned to cross the intervening space were moments of inward boiling and sizzling to Bull. To see a man sitting down, or "corking off" on deck always drew a snort from him, and made him see red.

"Ease" and "efficiency" were two words that belonged far apart—not made to dovetail.

We were anchored off Block Island, Massachusetts, the day Bull came aboard and took the ship over. He started right in by calling all hands aft.

No man in that crew will ever forget his introductory speech. He bristled like a porcupine, as he stood there on the quarter-deck, belching it out to us. "Belching" best describes his way of talking. It came out of him in short, snappy growls, or snarls, bitten off in groups of four or five words each. He belched—

"Remembah—'s is a battle-ship—nott a yachtt!" He paused and glared at us while that was sinking in.

"I want every man on the jump! Move! Run! Execute all ordahs—on the-e—dou-b-l-e."

He sort of hung lovingly over that word "double."

"Do everything with a snap! A snappy snap!" he barked. "Out of your hammocks in the morning with a snap! Lash and stow with a snap! Work, drill with a snap! Eat with a snap! Into your hammocks at night with a snap!"

He bit that off with a sidewise snap of his head.

He went on to say that he wanted everybody to ride somebody: The officers were

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to ride the petty-officers; the petties to ride the seamen and firemen;

"And I'll ride you all!" he finished with a roar.

I stood beside one Jerry Smith, a lad in my watch. I was then a quartermaster on the signal bridge.

"Who are you seamen and coal-heavers goin' to ride, Jerry?" I whispered.

Jerry answered several minutes later, after the Bull had finished, as we were marching forward.

"Who are we gonna ride? Why, if she gets too hot, we're just gonna ride over the hill," he announced.

And about three months later, Jerry was one of the many who had gone over the hill. They ran away from that ship like rats!

She was a madhouse! Drill, drill, drill! We got it going and coming! "Retreat" on the bugle didn't mean "that's all;" it meant—

"Stand by for what's coming."

It was a continuous performance. Lay out bags, hammocks, ditty-boxes for inspection; break 'em out, spread 'em out, gather 'em up again, stow 'em.

Never could a man, with a feeling of security, flemish himself down on deck for a snooze. Always those jarring metallic tunes, that meant "Abandon ship," "Man overboard," "Collision," "Fire," would come crashing in upon him before he got to a doze!

All requests for transfer, or discharge, along with letters of complaint, were waste-basketed. Officialdom had no time for anything but court-martial cases.

Of course that couldn't last. It didn't. We never learned just why the Bull suddenly loosened up. It was whispered about decks that influential relatives of some of the boys did a little buzzing around Washington. At any rate, things suddenly quieted down. Men stopped going over the hill; court-martial cases grew less and less numerous; and, although the ship didn't by any means become a home, she ceased to be the floating lunatic-asylum she had been during those few months, or the "Period of Horrors," as we called it.

IT WAS about three months after the Period of Horrors. We were bound south to join the fleet at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and had arrived at a point about a hundred miles off the Bahama Islands, which lie to the east of southern Florida.

It was about ten o'clock at night. We were five, perched on top of the port flag-board, like blackbirds along a rail. Things were quiet. As a signal quartermaster I had charge of a watch of four men besides myself—"Snootful," "Scotty," "Heinie," and "Sister." As the ship was proceeding singly, there was nothing for the signal-gang to do but come on watch, work our jaws for four hours, and then be relieved.

"How about a couple or three of us gettin' some hay?" suggested Snootful. "No use all of us stayin' up."

"O. K., if 'Hawkeye' is asleep," I replied —Hawkeye was our chief— "Jump down and take a peep in the C. P. O. quarters," I said to Sister, who was junior man in the watch.

Sister never took that peep. At that moment some one started something.

"Help! help! help!"

It came from off on the water, in a high shrieking voice. Seemed it started from off the port bow and wound up off the quarter. We were moving along at fifteen knots.

The officer who had the deck that night was a pinch-thinker. He had the rudder hard over, and one propeller backing to help pivot 'er, almost before the last "help!" died out astern.

Five minutes later, when the captain, executive, navigator came trailing up the bridge-ladder, the ship was laying to, six searchlights' beams were sweeping the water, and both whaleboats were out circling the ship. He was *some* officer of the deck.

"Pipe down, on deck!" he bawled down to the forecastle and topside.

The ship being somewhat top-heavy, swinging her around in that manner caused her to lay over nearly on her side. This naturally brought the "flatfeet" below out of their hammocks. From stem to stern, hatches leading up on deck poured forth streams of excited, chattering gobs.

We searched. For an hour we flooded the water with all our dynamos would deliver, and strained our eyes and ears, without discovering a thing. Every man on the upper decks had heard the voice; we had swung about and returned to the spot from where it had come—it was puzzling.

"Mighty strange," commented the executive to the Bull. "We're a good hundred miles from the nearest island—there

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couldn't be a fishboat, or the like, out here. Besides, the sea is like glass—how could anything capsize?"

"Recall your boats, and secure your searchlights," Bull ordered.

No sooner had we hoisted the boats and got under way when, "Help! help! help!" screamed that voice again. This time it came from far astern.

"Belay that, Wenwick."

Bull checked the officer of the deck, who had started to snap out another string of orders, and we went ahead, unheedful of the voice that died out in our wake.

The Bull and the executive were standing a little inboard from where we were huddled. I gave Sister a nudge, and the pair of us eased in toward them. Before we could get near enough to horn in on their conversation, however, from dead ahead, seemingly a hundred feet high, a wild, cackling voice called:

"You're a foxy old skipper, ain't you. I say, you're a foxy old skipper——" repeating it several times.

Bull grunted like a sick old pig. Then—

"You see?"

Then light dawned on me.

"What's it all about, 'Breeze'?" whispered Sister at my side.

"Guess we've got a ventriloquist aboard," I answered.

"A vent——" he began, but caught himself. "Oh, I see."

Which I knew was a lie. He had no more idea of what a ventriloquist was, than I had of what the fourth dimension is.

And twenty minutes later, after things had quieted down, just to confirm that hunch, I followed Sister below. I watched him go to his ditty-box, take out something, and then step over to a standing-light. I eased up behind him and looked over his shoulder. He had his little dictionary opened out to the V's, and was mumbling to himself—

"——art of speaking in such a manner that the voice appears to come, not from the person speaking, but from some distant or different point."

"Now, Sister," I broke in on him, "if you'd asked me, I could have saved you all this trouble."

For a moment he stood there holding the book behind him, like a kid caught stealing a pie. Then his pride took fire, and he flared up in come-back.

"Breeze, you just naturally like to rub it in don't you! What good does it do you to be always camping on my trail, trying to get a giggle on me? Answer me that!"

At that the roots of my red hair commenced to burn.

"Listen here, you rubber boot," I went back. "If I didn't take the job of makin' a sailor out of you, who would take it? Only for me you'd still be shakin' the bangs out of your eyes, wearin' a handkerchief in your sleeve, sayin' 'darn it,' 'goodness,' 'mercy,' and a thousand other expressions that belong strictly to females."

It's the truth—for a long time he wouldn't get under bare poles to take a bath, if any one happened to be around.

That took the indignant flutter out of him.

"Well—I'm learning," he returned, as we started up the ladder. "You must admit, Breeze, it's not my fault that I was wished into a family of ten children, nine of them girls."

Now it certainly wasn't, I had to admit, slapping him on the back. You had to like the kid—if he *did* have pink skin, sky-blue eyes and effeminate ways.

Sister came to the ship shortly after the Period of Horrors. I had a stiff argument with Hawkeye, the chief, when he grabbed him for the bridge, and inserted him in my watch in Jerry Smith's place. But as well argue with a mule, as with Hawkeye.

However, Sister—they christened him that right off the bat (his name was Smith, too)—learned rapidly. What it had taken those nine sisters twenty-one years to weave into him, it took the Navy just about a month or two to hammer out.

THE next morning we had the eight to twelve watch. After inhaling their beans, they came straggling up onto the bridge, each one putting the same question—

"Did you see what's on the bulletin-board?"

Everybody was talking about that bulletin-notice that morning. It read:

There is a ventriloquist on this ship. To any man who can give information that will lead to his apprehension, the following, by way of reward, is offered:

Advancement to next higher rating, without examination, in any branch desired;

Thirty days' furlough, with traveling-time as requested.

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It went on to promise that intelligence received would be handled in strictest confidence.

"Just as if" grinned Scotty, "everybody wouldn't know the man that snitched, when he'd be gettin' boosted in rate and given a long furlough."

"Strategy *à la Bull*," contributed Snootful.

At nine o'clock "quarters" sounded. Bull came up and, as was his habit, mounted the flying-bridge. That's way up, above the bridge proper. He used to like to stand up there and watch the divisions below go through "monkey drill." Nothing pleased that old snorter more than to see his men heave, puff and strain.

He stood up there glowering down. If I know how to tell what's at the back of a man's head by the look on his face, Bull would have liked, that morning, to be able to turn the ship upside down and dump everybody aboard, but himself, into the sharks.

And then it came—that cackling voice from the skies.

"Good-morning, Bull, you old grouch. Did you have your noodle soup this morning?" Bull had a passion for noodle soup—"I say, Bull, did you gargle your noodle soup this morning? Bull, old jackass—"

It came, first from straight out, then shifted to dead ahead, then to astern.

The old snorter's face underwent a series of twists and squints that was comical. His head jerked to left and right, drawn toward the point from which the voice issued. He was puzzled. For perhaps a second, he evidenced an ever-so-faint inclination to grin. Then it worked in on him that he was the object of the laughing eyes and twisted mugs of the men lined up on the decks below, and he went hog-wild.

His hand went up to his cap; the cap went back, uncovering his bald head.

One of the duties of an executive officer is to soothe the captain in his moments of wrath. So zealous was that officer, in his scramble to get up the flying-bridge ladder to the side of the Bull, that he collided with the navigator, who also was flying-bridge bound. As a result of the collision both reached the Bull's side capless. Three bald heads lined the flying-bridge rail. Looking up you couldn't help but think of a pawnbroker's sign.

"Oh, look, look, look! Money to lend! Oy-yoi-yoi!"

From straight overhead it came—what made it worse was that Bull had a Jewish name—and then, from high up and far out:

"Look at the Bull, fellows. Look at him blush. I say, look at the old silly ass blush!"

Strictly, the old boy was purple.

What could he do? Four divisions of men were lined up on the forecastle and topside; there were men on the bridge, aloft and about decks on various duties—perhaps four hundred in all, or about half the crew. He had no way of telling which one out of all that gang it was.

He did what was perhaps the most expedient thing he could have done—ordered the bugler to sound "Double-time—march!"

Whereupon the divisions below did "Right face" and went round and round over the decks on the double. The laughing gazes were withdrawn—it behooves a man running over the decks of a battle-ship to watch his step.

Bull then eased down two decks and aft to his cabin. Once safe there, he sent the orderly up to tell the bugler to sound "Halt."

Later that morning Bull had the offer on the bulletin-boards boosted. He made it ninety days' leave, instead of thirty. That part pertaining to advancement was left unchanged.

CAME one Saturday morning. We were lined up for captain's inspection.

All my watch "fell in" on the forecastle, with the fifth, or "politicians'" division. When we had executed "Open-ranks, front-rank-about"—a formation which brings the front and the rear ranks three paces apart and facing each other—I was brought facing Snootful, Scotty, Heinie and Sister, all standing in a row opposite me.

I was shaky that morning for the reason that I had on a pair of non-regulation shoes. Common sense would have told me not to wear those shoes to inspection.

The division officer smiled when he spotted them.

"It depends, of course, on how the captain feels," he said, with an indifferent shrug; then he passed me up.

"Feels!" I scoffed in a whisper to the fellow next to me. "What he means is that it depends on what the Bull is inspectin'. If he's out after jumpers, undershirts, hats, or hair-cuts, I'm flyin' hunky-dory; but if

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he's lookin' below the belt, at pants, socks, or shoes, ta ta my twelve-smack kicks."

"Along with the bird on your arm, maybe," he replied, meaning my insignia.

"Likely," I said. "But *feel?* The Bull never had that sense."

A few minutes later "Attention" on the bugle heralded the approach of the Exalted. Twisting my eyes sidewise, I watched him start forward on that rear rank. Then creepy chills went up and down my spine; for I noted that the old hooker was inspecting below the belt, low, extremely low. He was out after shoes!

When he arrived in front of me and clapped eyes on my shoes, he came to a dead stop, planted his feet wide apart, folded his arms, cocked his head to one side, and just stood there licking his chops. "Bull" nothing! Right at that moment he impressed me more as a hungry lion. I know my red hair stood up, because I felt my hat move. Nothing but a miracle could save those shoes and keep me from being disrated.

At length, after a grunt or two, he began—

"Is this man a petty-officah?"

He was addressing the division officer, but not for a wink did he take his gaze from my shoes.

A miracle *did* save me—a voice from the skies. But there was nothing that would make you think of higher realms in the tone-quality of *that* wild cackling voice. Nor were those utterances the voicings of above-the-world sentiments.

"You're a fine old —— of a skipper, ain't you? Say, you old ——."

I wouldn't repeat it on a bet.

No one ever heard me complain about "the party getting rough." But there are some brands of obscenity that cut against the grain, in the most case-hardened—language that hurts your ears. Such was the cyclone of rottenness that came gushing out of the skies that Saturday morning.

Over the Bull's shoulder I saw my four "bunting-tossers," Heinie and Snootful—nothing could touch either of that pair—each had a shameless grin from ear to ear. Scotty, always a quiet, conscientious little lad, stood there with eyes and mouth wide open, dumfounded. But Sister! He was the color of a June rose! His face muscles moved convulsively, his eyes rolled, and he quivered all over like a jelly-fish. You see, having been brought up among nine sisters, naturally his inner portions were sort of delicate, sensitive.

Abruptly the Bull forgot about my non-regulation shoes. He tilted his head and stood for a moment glaring into the heavens. Then he turned to the color of a lilac. His arms went out fanning the air, his feet stamped on the deck; he snorted, sputtered, fumed. With his lips he tried to shape out words, but an incoherent snarl was all he could emit.

"Go back to your hole, you ——." Then the voice above paused, as if to allow Bull to comply.

Bull *did* make for his hole. He terminated the inspection right then.

"And stay there, you ——," as Bull disappeared in the break of the superstructure.

LATER, squatting on the topside, Snootful remarked—

"Come to think of it, Breeze, that ventriloquist saved your civy kicks, eh?"

Sister joined us.

"The bulletin notice has been changed," he informed. "Two advancements in rating, and *six months' furlough,* with the six months' pay in advance, before leaving the ship, to any man, or *combination of men,* who turns in 'Venty'."

After imparting this, Sister looked from one to another of us wistfully. We all sat there, silent.

"Good offer, eh?" he added tentatively.

"Pay in advance!" snorted Snootfull. "That's some more strategy *à la Bull.* They can't pay in advance."

"No, but the captain can advance it out of his own pocket."

Sister always referred to old Redeye as the "Captain."

There was silence for a few moments. Then Sister grew reckless.

"Let's us, our watch," he began, "form a combination to get that fellow. Just imagine! we'd all get boosted two rates, draw six months' pay, and then shove off for six months' vacation!"

"You ain't talkin' my language," snapped Heinie.

"Mine either," Snootful chimed in.

"Fine proposition!" Scotty exploded. "He's a friend of Breeze's, ain't he? I ain't stuck on his foul-mouthed stuff myself. But I notice he pulled his trick this morning

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just as the Bull was about to put the hooks to Breeze for his civy kicks."

"He did for a fact," I confirmed.

"And now," Snootful flared up, "us form a clique to get him? That your idea of sportsmanship?" He glared at Sister.

"Who cares how much of a monkey he makes of the Bull anyway?" interrogated Heinie.

Sister was snowed under.

"I didn't think of it in that way," he said meekly. "I was thinking of the reward."

FROM that morning on Bull knew no peace. Every time he came on deck, that wild, maniacal voice gibbered at him from the sky, or from off on the water. Not even a few minutes' quiet stroll back on his quarterdeck, would Venty allow him. And Venty had a supernatural way of always knowing when Bull was on deck. Sometimes Bull's head would no more than appear above the cabin hatch, when Venty would cut loose. Bull was a prisoner on his own ship.

To the standing offer embodied in the bulletin-notice was added—

"A complete amnesty for all past offenses."

A clean slate for the man who would snitch. Yet, tempting though the offer was, it had no takers. No one would lend a hand in apprehending Venty.

At length Bull set his own wits to work. He knew, or was quite sure, that Venty was attached to one of the four divisions that mustered at quarters on the topside and forecastle. He commenced sending detachments of twenty to thirty men each out of these divisions ashore on some duty or other. Then, with a detachment ashore, Bull would appear on deck and allow Venty to have his will of him.

Thus he split us in two—the Ventys and the non-Ventys. If Venty cut loose while a detachment was ashore, the name of every man in that detachment was entered in Bull's non-Venty book. If, during the absence of a detachment, Venty kept silent, the men in the shore-detail were looked upon as suspicious possibilities, and as such were entered in the Venty book. By this process of elimination Bull hoped to weed us out, a few at a time, and eventually nail down Venty.

This scheme worked well for a time. Bull succeeded in entering about a hundred names in his non-Venty book. None of these could possibly be the ventriloquist, because they were known to have been away from the ship while Venty was operating.

The joker was—Venty got wise. One morning, as a boatload of men was leaving the gangway, Venty, in his usual way, let the Bull *know* that he was wise. I was in that boat, along with my gang. We had no more than left the gangway when Bull showed himself on the quarterdeck.

"I say, Bull," Venty yelled down, "check off the name of every man in that boat. He's not one of them. And say, you silly old sucker, hereafter you'll hear from me only when the whole ship's company is aboard!"

"Look at the old man scud for his hole," I remember hearing Snootful say. I was thinking. Only the night before Scotty had remarked that it looked as if the Bull was trying, by sending these parties ashore, to sort out Venty. We had talked of nothing else during the entire watch.

Well, we didn't go in to the beach that morning. The recall flag was hoisted from the bridge before we had proceeded a hundred yards.

That terminated the Bull's scheme of elimination. Shortly after that, word leaked out that the Bull had submitted his resignation. This was of far greater moment, and more interesting to us than was the apprehension of Venty.

The offer on the bulletins stood. No one was tempted, however, for none of us had forgotten the Period of Horrors. And, so long as Venty harassed no one but the Bull, we all secretly enjoyed seeing him get away with it.

THERE came a day, however, when Venty got it into his head to take a whirl at me. Perhaps, I reasoned at the time, he felt that I owed him something for saving my kicks at inspection that day. At any rate, he made a complete monkey out of me; and he did it at a time when it actually hurt.

The signal-force of the fleet admiral was not up to snuff; and his flag-lieutenant decided on some changes. He wanted four signal quartermasters; but they must be the four top-notchers of the fleet. The leading requirement was, ability to read speedily sent semaphore. This is a method of communicating with small hand-flags.

Much after the manner of deaf-and-dumb

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folk spelling out words with hands and fingers, a signal-man, by holding his flags at certain angles, makes letters of the alphabet and spells out messages.

To select the four men he wanted, the flag-lieutenant arranged for a semaphore test. Fast senders, working in relays, were to send a five-hundred-word message from the flagship bridge. That all contestants might have an equally advantageous point to receive from, those taking part were to gather aboard our ship, and spread out along the rails, each man with his recorder. At the finish each man was to sign his copy and send it to the flagship. The four men turning in the nearest perfect copies were to be transferred to the flagship.

I wanted in the worst way to be one of those four—not only because I was sick of the Bull's ship, but because being on the flagship bridge was big stuff. It meant "getting close to the Big Noise," as we used to put it. I simply had to make it.

And so, every day for about two weeks before the contest, I had all our speedy senders shoot semaphore at me till they were blue in the faces. Day after day I'd stand there and read that stuff for as long as they could be begged to send it to me.

The day came. Contestants from other ships piled aboard and spread out along our rails. Noting that some of them had two men to record for them, I took Sister and Scotty, both excellent scribes. I got Hawkeye to pinch the Bull's binoculars. With these, and a good spot at the rail, where I could lean forward on my elbows, I couldn't lose.

Cocksure, I was, from the moment the man on the flagship began sending. One hundred, two hundred words, I sang out to Sis. and Scotty—it was "duck soup." Every flourish of the sender's flags to me was a letter as plain and distinct as if printed on the page of a book. I knew I'd turn in a perfect copy. Those two weeks' practise had done the work—I couldn't miss a word if I tried.

Along toward the three-hundred-word mark I sailed without a flunk, getting more and more cocksure with each word received. Time and again I laughed inwardly, as I heard the fellows a few yards away to either side of me call out "dash" to their recorders—meaning they had dropped a word. I hadn't dropped one.

"Keep it up, Breeze. Don't weaken. Hang on."

"Shut up!" I barked between words of the message.

"It's not me," chirped Sister.

"Me either," echoed Scotty.

It was Venty. From wherever he was, he was throwing his voice right into my ears. Now it was a foot from one ear—then it would jump to the other side of me—next it was over my head—again, ten feet away. It was as if some one were dancing and jumping about and over me, chattering, giggling, buzzing.

And he kept it up.

"Stay with 'em, Breeze. You can't lose. Silly ass, brick-top, silly ass, brick-top, silly ass, brick-top."

Right then I decided he wouldn't put it over. I forgot that I was red-headed and concentrated.

But—

"Buzz, buzz, buzz——"

If my hands had been free, I might have held my ears shut; but the binoculars had to be held to my eyes. And then, to make matters worse, Sister and Scotty had trouble hearing what I called out.

"Dash!" I yelled, one word missed; and a moment later, "Dash dash!" Two more.

I began to sweat blood. All this time, remember, Venty was buzzing in my ears.

Then Venty had heart enough to knock off for a moment. I began to regain confidence. After all, I had dropped only three words. There remained only about a hundred words to go; I still had a royal chance to become one of the admiral's boys.

"Rotten trick," declared Sister, very softly.

"Shut up!" I snapped in between words of the message. Then, "Don't put that down"—meaning my "shut up."

Then Venty opened up again.

"Smatter, Breeze. I say Bree-ee-eeze," danced that impish voice about me, "are you pee-ee-ee-ved?"

Make no mistake—I would have landed that billet. Fifty words to go—I had dropped only three. The four winners in that test dropped more than ten words each. Yes, sir, by the head of Napoleon, I'd have been one of the admiral's boys.

Every man on that ship knew me to have one outstanding weakness—dogs. One man in particular knew it that afternoon. When Venty saw I was going to win through in spite of him, he commenced imitating a dog barking at my heels.

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Of course after that it was all off. Any time I hear the snarl of a mad dog at my heels, I'm hoisting those heels abruptly. Up shot my heels, up and on over—over the rail I somersaulted and plunked into the water.

THAT was my reason for souring on Venty. Up to that day, along with the rest, I had always inwardly applauded his voice-throwing stunts. We all thought it was mighty clever, the way Venty kept the Bull mewed up in his cabin. But I failed utterly to note anything clever, or shipmate like, in making me out a ridiculous jackass before the entire crew.

Yes, sir, Breeze was a blue boy that afternoon. Of course, when a man feels that way he wants solitude. The quietest place on the ship that I knew of was the conning-tower. Into it I crawled.

The conning-tower was directly below the center of the bridge, and connected with the bridge by a voice-tube. I sat there on a ditty-box, with one ear close to this tube. It was open at the other end, hence I could hear every word spoken on the bridge.

"Sure it was a dirty trick," spoke Sister. "But it serves Breeze right. I wanted to form a combination long ago to get that fellow, and none of you would listen to me."

Right then I woke up. Out of the conning-tower I went on the hop-skip-and-jump. In making for the bridge ladder I barely averted a collision with his Royal Redness, the Bull himself, who at that moment was emerging from the chart-house. Begging his pardon on the hop-skip-and jump, I hop-skip-and-jumped on up the bridge ladder.

"What have you got up your sleeve, Sister?" I demanded. "How are we goin' to get Venty?"

Sister was anything but sluggish. A quick glance at the open speaking-tube at his side told him that I had heard the conversation from the conning-tower below.

"Get him? Easy," he replied. "But I can't do it alone."

"After the dirt he done Breeze today you can count me in," announced Snootful, who lay sprawled on deck between the steering-wheel and compass stand. The bridge was our hang-out when the ship was not under way.

"Me too," and "Sure," chorused Heinie and Scotty, both sitting on deck with their backs to the row of voice-tubes.

"Unfold, Sis," I encouraged.

"Well, in the first place," Sister began, "Venty always operates either from some point on the upper decks, or through a port-hole on the gun-deck. He sees the captain come on deck and cuts loose, either from where he is on the topside or fo'c'sle, or jumps down to the gun-deck and yells through a port. When his voice comes from up high, I dope it out he's shooting from one of the upper decks; when it comes from down low in the water, then he's cackling through one of the gun-deck ports.

"Now if we form a combination to get him, all we have to do is stick together, which we always do anyway. Then we watch our chance. Every time he opens up, Breeze gives the word—'Scatter high, starboard or port,' or 'Scatter low, starboard or port.'

"Then we four scatter. For instance, if it's 'high,' Scotty and Heinie take, say, the fo'c'sle, and Snoots and I the topside; if it's 'low,' we all cover the same territory along the gun-deck."

"And do what?" I queried.

"Take names," he enlightened us. "We all carry notebooks and pencils."

"Ye-ah? Another process of elimination, eh?" It didn't look big to me.

"Sure." And to drive home his idea, Sister went on: "You see, Breeze, names are bound to recur. And if we keep a record of them——"

"Sister," I broke in, "we'd all of us retire with thirty years service before that'd work out. It might be feasible if Venty was operatin' every day. But B——"

I had on the tip of my tongue, "Bull does not show himself on——" But I stuck in the utterance of that word "Bull." It caught cross-wise in my throat. Good thing, too; for, turning, I looked into the red eyes of the old Snorter himself. He was unsatisfied, apparently, with my hop-skip-and-jump apology of a few minutes before. He had followed me up.

After glowering redly upon me for a few moments, he shifted his gaze onto Sister. Such an abrupt and complete transformation in a face was beyond my imagination. Never had I seen the old sizzler look kindly at anybody. Yet there he stood, looking at Sister as a father looks at his son.

"Lad, what is your name?" he inquired

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in a voice that was almost human. "And, ah, rate?"

"Smith, sir; I'm a seaman," Sister answered in that bashful way of his.

Bull turned to his orderly—

"Tell my yeoman to give you about a half-dozen of those little notebooks, and, ah, bring them heah," he ordered the marine.

Then he again turned his bulldog-face on Sister, and proceeded to regard him with that profound fatherliness, of which none of us had ever thought the old hooker capable.

"I chanced to overhear your, ah, conversation, as I came up the, ah, laddah," he said gently to Sister. "And yours!" he snapped sidewise at me. Then he continued to Sister:

"It's highly pleasing to see the light of ingenuity shining from out of the muck of the rank-and-file." He paused, beaming on Sister. "The plan you just proposed shows organization ability, fertility of imagination, resourcefulness." After which he turned and glared redly upon me.

I didn't care how redly he glared, just so he kept glaring above the belt; for I had on those twelve-smack shoes.

But it seemed he had the hunch. Starting with my red hair, that glare of his moved downward, slowly, but ever so persistently. Down, down, down to my knees——

"O, Bull!" From straight out abeam, down low in the water, it came.

That one time, Breeze used the stuff that lay beneath his red hair.

"Scatter low, starboard!" I barked.

Snootful, Scotty, Heinie and Sister, all mixed up in a tangle of arms and legs, went piling down the ladder.

I made my getaway out to the starboard wing.

"That was, ah, very well done," Bull called after me. "The, ah, next time, they'll have the, ah, notebooks." Then he scudded.

AFTER that, Bull no longer remained mewed up in his cabin. The old boy actually commenced deliberately to show himself on deck several times a day, thus exposing himself to the merciless gibberings of Venty. But only for long enough to draw that insulting voice from the sky, or water, would he remain exposed. After our "Scatter" signal had been given, Bull would immediately disappear below.

Names, names, names! After each scattering they would come back, each with a pageful of names. Then my work would begin. I had to enter each name in a big ledger, with which the Bull had had us provided, or, if I found that a name had already been entered, place a check-mark beside it. This book we delivered to the cabin every evening.

Into the small hours of the night Bull would sit pondering over that book. As soon as a certain man's name began to show an undue number of check-marks, Bull would center his ingenuity on that man. He'd have the enlistment record brought before him; send the yeoman out to gather data pertaining to his character, habits, peculiarities; and finally, would summon the man aft for a process of questioning.

On that morning at inspection I had said the Bull had no feeling. I retracted that, when one day he summoned Hawkeye aft and told him that my watch was to be excused from all duty. So that, from then on, our sole duty was to lay for Venty.

Bull made it still easier for us, by giving us a "stand by" every time he was about to come on deck. The only thing in any way constraining on us was, that we were not to get widely separated. We were to remain close together; as far as practicable, be always standing by to go scattering after names, the instant the orderly gave us the "Bull's coming on deck."

"Breeze's Silent Scatterers," they dubbed us. We became the laughing stock of the ship, and, before long, of the entire fleet.

"White mice!" they hooted at us.

"He did Breeze dirt!" my gang defended hotly.

We had a big man-handler on that ship named Grote. His was the brawn of an ox and the brain of a jackass. Almost two hundred pounds of hard flesh and muscle was wrapped up in his frame. Behind his apish, receding forehead he carried nothing, manifestly, but the knowledge that he could fight, and an insatiable desire to prove it on some one. Grote liked to pick on Sister.

"Did you get Venty yet, girlie?" he sneered at Sister one afternoon on the forecastle. We were sitting on deck playing pinochle.

"Make it clubs," said Sister unheeding.

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"How many times you got me checked in the big book, Breeze?" Grote persisted.

"Oh, we know it's not you, Grote," Sister spoke up. "Whoever he is, Venty has brains."

"Now wha'd'yuh think o' that!" Grote came back. "Aint she the sassy brat!"

Right then—believe it or don't. I've got a notebookful of names and addresses of men who saw it!

Sister straightened up like a jack-in-a-box, went over my head and into Grote. Fight! Sister was a hurricane, whirlwind and wildcat, all wrapped in one bundle! He moved around that big slob so fast you couldn't see him; but you could hear the smacks and thuds of the wallops he rained over.

In less than a minute Sister had laid the big bull-dozer out cold. It all happened so quickly it was hard to believe. Everybody was rubbing his eyes and looking again and again at the blue-eyed, blond-haired, pink-skinned kid, who stood there David-like, looking down on that hundred and ninety pounds of senseless bulk.

I was thinking. Nine sisters! They must have been whales!

"Breeze," whispered the orderly at my side, "the captain's on deck."

Here called the voice of duty. I must have my scatterers standing by, in case Venty should cut loose. But before I could round my clique out of the mob that had gathered, came the roar of that terror-striking voice from over the bridge rail.

"Smith! I say, Smith! Come heah!"

It being in accordance with our instructions—to remain together—Snootful, Scotty, Heinie and I trailed along in Sister's wake, up to the topside, then up to the bridge. Curiosity, too, prompted us to follow close at his heels. The old man had witnessed the fight. Would this undreamed-of fistic prowess of Sister's increase or decrease his prestige with Bull? I had misgivings.

I had the wrong hunch. Sister, heading the procession up the ladder, was met by that fatherly, indulgent, benign grin. Never had I seen the old boy so tickled as he was then.

"My lad," he said, "I'm very proud of you. A little lattah, go back to the executive officah's yeoman; he'll have something to say to you."

And then Venty chirped down from the skies:

"Bull! take your hand off that boy's shoulder! Bull! can't you see the boy blush!"

"Scatter high, port!" I ripped out.

A little later, after handing over his notebook, Sister went back to the executive's office. He returned to the bridge, flushed and elated.

"I'm now a dignified petty-officer," he informed us. "One rate behind you, Breeze."

The Bull had rated him quartermaster third-class.

SISTER joined us on the topside one afternoon. We were nearing the Delaware Breakwater, navy-yard bound. His blue eyes were fairly sparkling. His face was lit up like a kid's on Christmas Day. His head was up in the clouds.

"Inherit a million?" was my first guess.

"Some dope about Venty?" Snootful tried.

"Might as well gush it," we finally spoke up in chorus.

"I've been back in the cabin," he responded. "Look at this." He held out a gold watch.

It was as handsome a time-piece as any of us had ever looked at.

"The Bull gave yuh that?" demanded Heinie.

"To remember him by," Sister replied.

"Likes you a whole lot, don't he," grinned Snootful.

"To remember him—" Then I saw the light. "Ah-hah! His resignation approved, eh?"

To which Sister replied:

"Uh-huh. He leaves as soon as we get into the yard."

Well, this was happy news. But I didn't like the idea of him showering treasures and honors on Sister. The best the rest of us could ever get out of the old razzler was a growl.

"Why don't you ask him to take you along with him?" I put it sarcastically, because I felt that way.

"Breeze, old sucker, that's precisely the proposition I put up to him," Sister shot back. "And the dear old dear jumped at it. I'm to be his private secretary. He has a few affairs in civilian life. It'll be sweet, soft and sponge-like for me." He paused.

Every one of us stood there glowering at him.

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"His yeoman," he continued, "is making out my request for discharge by purchase. The captain says he'll put it through with a run. You know, he's a nice old devil, when you get in with him."

"Yah," said Snootful; "but only one man out of nine hundred can get in with him. I suppose he's payin' for your discharge, what?"

"Um-hm."

"Which means," said Scotty, "that Breeze's Silent Scatterers disorganize. That offer on the bulletin won't stand with a new skipper."

"For which I'm mighty thankful," said I. "I knew right off the bat that scheme would fizzle."

"But think of the fun we had, Breeze!" And Sister looked up at the sky as he went on dramatically: "Why, think, Breeze, old Brick-top! Think of the happy dreams in the years to come! You'll lie on your pillow and dream of the days when we went scattering, scattering, scattering, and came back with names, names, names! Venty's to the right of them, Venty's to the left of them! To the right, to the left, above, below——" And he walked away, cackling it over and over.

I turned on Snootful:

"And because he was the proposer of that hare-brained scheme, the Bull lavishes jewelry on him, buys his discharge, makes him his private secretary. Pretty rich, eh?"

Snootful walked over to the rail and spat viciously over the side.

THE Bull left us a few days after we arrived in the yard. We got in his place one of the finest captains in the Navy.

It took Sister's request about a week to make its red-tape run and come back approved. He got the word one afternoon to lash up his bag and hammock and stand by. Instead of packing up, however, he toted everything he owned—bag, hammock and ditty-box—up on to the bridge and spread it out on deck.

"Whack it up among you," he said to the few assembled in the center of the bridge.

I was out on the port wing at the time, mending flags, with one of those small, hurdy-gurdy hand sewing-machines.

After watching them wrangle over his outfit for a few minutes, Sister came out on to the wing and joined me. Propped up on the flag-board, he sat silently watching me turn the hurdy-gurdy with one hand, and feed bunting through with the other.

"Must be straight ——," he yawned.

I looked up quickly. This didn't sound like our clean-mouthed, strictly decent, Sister.

"I mean, to have a whole year to do," he added.

I stopped turning the hurdy-gurdy for long enough to retort—

"I didn't have a resigned skipper to buy me out before my name got dry on the books."

He yawned again.

"Not to say a word about valuable jewelry," I finished, and went on turning the hurdy-gurdy.

That remark prompted him to draw forth that handsome watch.

"Three o'clock," he said impatiently. "Another fifteen minutes to wait for that yeoman to get my papers signed."

He then commenced to hum. He had always got on my nerves, when he hummed in that high soprano voice. He could sing just like a woman.

First thing I knew, due to that irritating humming of his, I got one of my fingers pinched in the machine.

"Who's to lock up the canary!" I rasped.

When I gave him that growl, he was coming in on the last line of a song. He didn't stop singing. He went right on carrying the tune; but he changed the words. And, somehow, they just happened to fit to the melody. They were—

"Oh — Breeze — you — may — go — to ——."

And on those last three words, Sister pulled the one grand bonehead of his life.

The word "go" came from Sister, right where he sat; the word "to," from over the forward turret, forty feet away; and the last word came from far up in the skies!

Yes, sir, Sister was Venty.

HOW he did it without breaking his neck, search me! It was a drop of about twenty feet to the deck below—drop enough to give a goodly jar, even if one did happen to land on his feet. Yet Sister made it. Backward, right over the flag-board he somersaulted, and fell to the topside deck below.

Inboard and around, down the ladder I dashed, fully and fearfully expecting to find

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Sister stretched out unconscious—for the deck below was of steel.

He was not there.

Over topside, forecastle, gun-deck, quarter-deck, I searched. I looked in all the offices, deck-lockers, galley, bakery, around boats—no Sister. I tackled the berth-deck; the engine, fire, dynamo rooms. I looked in every unlocked storeroom. No Sister.

It suddenly occurred to me what a bone-head I was. Why not wait for him at the quarter-deck gangway? grab him as he left the ship? Aft I went.

Stepping through the door leading from the gun-deck out on to the quarter-deck, I had a head-on collision with Jerry Smith and Sister!

Jerry Smith, remember? The lad who had been in my watch long before? Who went over the hill during the Period of Horrors? That same boy.

I had reached that stage where a man begins to *demand*. I tried to demand. But they wouldn't give me a chance. Jerry kept pumping my arm up and down and gushing all over me; the while Sister kept hissing into my ears:

"Not now, Breeze—too many around! I'll explain it all—we'll all go ashore together—soon as Jerry arranges for liberty—he just came aboard."

"All right, all right," I finally made myself heard. "But Jerry—what are you doin' here? Ain't you afraid they'll nail you?"

We'd all given him up as a deserter. And then I noticed that Jerry was wearing a bird on his arm—the insignia of a gunner's mate, third-class.

"Oh, that's all passed and gone long ago—ancient history," Jerry laughed. "I reported back on another ship. Didn't the ship's writer ever tell you about my records being transferred. I worked all that from the outside. And now I'm transferred back again."

I GOT the rest of it later, in a place on Market Street, Philadelphia. Not a word would Sister or Jerry yield until we had made the long trolley trip from League Island to the city, and were comfortably seated in a leather-cushioned booth. Then Sister gave me the story.

Sister and Jerry were brothers.

Sister had, before he enlisted in the Navy, been on the vaudeville stage as a female impersonator and ventriloquist.

Those lads came from a long line of Kentucky Smiths. No one had ever put anything over on the Smith family, and got away with it.

When Sister heard of his brother's troubles, and learned that these were due to the mal-administration of the Bull, he broke from his stage contract, and became a blue-jacket. Sister was out after the Bull. With influential cooperation he contrived to get aboard the Bull's ship.

The rest has been told.

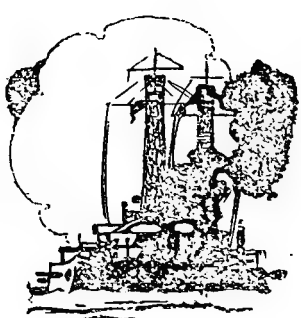
"But how about queerin' me out of that flag-ship billet?" I wanted to know.

"Breeze, old brick-top," he said, "I couldn't see you leaving the ship."

"And now you're goin' to be the Bull's private sec.?"

At that he laughed.

"No; I'm going back to the footlights. But I have his address," he added as an afterthought. "Some time when we're showing near him, I'll send him a couple of complimentary tickets."



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LONG KNIVES AND SHORT

by H. H. Birney, Jr.

Author of "The Man who Couldn't Miss."

THERE was a time, not so very many years ago, when our Army was known not as "the heroes in khaki" but as the "boys in blue." Those were the days when a soldier was a "recruit" until he sported at least one re-enlistment stripe on the sleeve of his dress-uniform; the days of the canteen, of the "clothing allowance," of thirteen dollars per month pay; when first lieutenants were gray-haired men with grown families, and many an officer went on the retired list as a captain.

Airplanes and tanks were undreamed of; machine-guns, automatic pistols, and smokeless powder had yet to make their appearance; body armor we considered as having gone out of date about the time of the landing of the *Mayflower*, and there was no more thought given to barrage-fire, camouflage, and the employment of poison gasses and flame than there was to Professor Einstein's theory of relativity.

And we soldiered in those days, too! Don't forget that for a minute! It wasn't a case of foray or raid from strong entrenchments against the gray-clad Hun; but of long, hot rides through choking alkali dust with every low hill the possible hiding-place of cunning, remorseless, naked foes, their copper skins bedaubed with pigments in startling contrasts of reds, yellows and blacks.

Men didn't straggle much from the march in those days. Not more than once, usually. If you did straggle—and were lucky—you might go out fighting. If luck wasn't with you your comrades found what the squaws left—maybe!

MY "BUNKY" in Troop J of the Twentieth Cavalry was old Dan Ryan. He'd have been top cutter if the booze had given him a chance. As it was he'd been three times a corporal and three times "rejuced." But there was more real soldiering, more knowledge of frontier warfare and the ways and wiles of the Indian, beneath his grizzled thatch than many a captain could boast.

"Sure, colonel," he said, when the "old man" swore him in for his seventh enlistment, "th' ar-r-my's mother and woife and choild to me. I c'ud no more kape out av ut than I c'ud kape out av throuble on payday. Man and boy, I've been in th' har-r-ness f'r over twinty years, and, God willin', I'll die an' be buried in ut."

"Well, Ryan, I'll do my best to give you your wish," the regimental commander told him. "It's a little in advance of the orders, but you might as well carry the news to the barracks. 'J' Troop, under Lieutenant Martin, goes out on field service tomorrow. There's another bunch of young bucks painted themselves up and jumped the reservation. I'm not promising you any fighting, but it will at least be a change from post duties."

Dan saluted punctiliously, faced about,

"*Long Knives and Short*," *copyright*, 1922, *by Herman H. Birney, Jr.*

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and withdrew, but his dignity had departed when he reached our quarters.

"B'ys, 'tis a shcrap! Oi feel it in me bones and Oi c'ud tell be th' twinkle in th' ould man's eye! If it ain't a shcrap, till me what Pete Spencer was doin' with Loo'tinint Mar-r-tin in th' ajjytant's office? W'ud they be sendin' th' biggest scout in th' Dakotas on a practise hike? An' th' sargeant-major was runnin' around loike a chicken wid its head off, gettin' maps an' dividers an' iverything else f'r thim. 'Tis a foight, I tell ye, an' me an' Betsy Ross an' th' rest av 'J' Throop are goin' to open th' ball!"

He begged the key to the arms-rack from the orderly-sergeant and fell to cleaning the already perfect surface of the .45-70-500 cavalry carbine he had named for the maker of the first flag. Softly he crooned as he rubbed and polished:

"'Tho' th' lasht glimpse av Erin wid sorrow I see
Yet wherever thou art shall seem Erin to me."

Those of us who were wise followed the old soldier's example and overhauled our equipment. We were that much ahead of the game, for the orders came down that night and "J" Troop pulled out at dawn the next morning; Pete Spencer, the most famous scout of the entire corps of experts that served the Government in that capacity, riding beside Lieutenant Martin at the head of the column.

For three days we slogged along through the Bad Lands with never a sign of a hostile red. Once or twice we saw smoke-signals on the horizon, and once we changed our course and swung far to the west after Spencer had had a long talk with an old buck who passed us on the march. We had heard that the raiding party numbered fifty young braves under the leadership of Yellow Eagle, son of a great war chief of the Sioux, and that they had raided a ranch lying along Tobacco Creek, killing two men and running off their stock.

On the third day Spencer left the column and we waited for him in the shade of a great square butte through the long afternoon. On his return we mounted and were led by him to the raided ranch.

"Now, some av ye rookies," muttered Dan, "ye can look on a sample av Sioux fancy-work and foind out how it sets on y'er stummicks!"

The sites of cabin, barn, and rude corral were marked by heaps of ashes. The work of years had gone up in smoke in a few minutes, but the opportunity to start afresh in a more peaceful locality was forever denied these particular pioneers. One of them lay half in and half out of the heap of ashes that had been his dwelling; the other, bristling with arrows, was between the house and the corral, his skull crushed with a war-club.

I remember yet—strange how minor details are impressed on the mind—how deeply his spurs had been driven into the ground in his death agony. Both he and his partner had been scalped, the raw, red tonsures gleaming strangely in the soft light of the late afternoon. It wasn't nice, and I thought even the lieutenant looked a shade whiter under his tan when he directed the top to assign a detail to bury them.

We got the poor remains under ground and a couple of rude crosses erected over them. Lieutenant Martin set the example for us all by removing his hat as he stood between the two graves.

"Men," he said quietly, "I'm no chaplain and running a funeral is not in my line. We don't know what faith these men followed so I'll just ask you all to join with me in the Lord's prayer, after which Bennett will blow taps."

He started us and lead the prayer, and with the last deep-toned "Amen" little Bennett blew, clear and true, the first notes of the bugle call, and then squawked off on a discord as one of the sentries on the picket-line challenged sharply "Halt! Who's there!"

Those words finished the funeral and the balance of the call was never blown. Lieutenant Martin hissed sharply: "Drop, men! Sergeant Green, take command. Ryan and Purcell, come with me!"

He jerked his heavy .45 out of the holster and crept down the hill toward the sentry, Dan and I following close on his heels.

The horses were quiet in the lines, showing none of the fear that trained cavalry animals often display at the presence of Indians, but the sentry maintained he had seen a man on horseback just beyond the limits of his post.

"I saw him, sir, as plainly as I see you this minute. I challenged and he just disappeared. But I know he's right there in the rocks beyond our horses."

One of the animals on the lines raised its head and neighed shrilly, and as if in reply

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to that sound a voice came from the hillside before us—the deepest voice I had ever heard from mortal chest.

"Hold your fire!" it boomed. "I am not of the number of your enemies. I would have speech with him that is the leader among you!"

Out from the rocky hollow where he had dropped at the challenge there strode an old, old man; as straight as a gun-barrel, clad in buckskin and moccasins, and with long white hair falling over his shoulders from beneath a fur cap with a pendant wolf's tail. His face was covered by a heavy beard that encroached upon his cheeks almost to his nose and fell over his broad chest. His eyes, black as night and as piercing as stars, gleamed wildly under bushy white brows.

"Be th' leg av th' lamb av' Luke," exclaimed Dan, " 'tis ould Pa-sappah himself. Git Spencer to tell ye about his habits, sor, so ye'll know how to take him."

His whisper died away as the intruder joined us and addressed the officer.

"My horse is among the rocks where I left him. I ask that you send one of your young men to bring him in and care for him. I am the flail of the Lord among these children of satan, and thy ways shall be my ways until thy mission is accomplished."

The lieutenant signalled Ryan to get the old man's mount and I followed the two of them to our camp by the ruined ranch, our bearded visitor cutting in in front of me and walking on our commander's left. I didn't pay much attention at the time to this knowledge of military courtesy as I was busy listening to him. Strange as it may seem, I felt no inclination to laugh, for on his lips the archaic expressions and the stilted Biblical phraseology seemed perfectly natural and carried deep conviction.

"For I say unto you," the deep voice boomed to the officer, "we shall go up against them in their fastnesses in the high hills. They are accursed before God and all mankind; cast off, as Lucifer of old, from any hope of ultimate grace; and even as glory and certain salvation attended those who went forth to battle for the Holy Sepulcher, so shall those who fall in this strife pass to the Throne and Victory perch upon our banners. Praise the Lord, the Lord mighty in battle!"

Being only a buck I didn't follow the lieutenant and his companion all the way but turned off at the fire about which my own squad were grouped. There Dan Ryan presently joined us.

"Lookut here, at what was hangin' on his nibs' saddle," he remarked as he passed the old frontiersman's gun to me, "I'll take it up to him prisintly, sayin' I thought he'd want it. But in the manetoime take a luk at ut. There ain't another fusee like that bechune here an' Dublin Castle!"

We gathered round and all of us agreed with the Irishman. The old-timer's gun was as curious an antique as he was himself. It was a double-barrel, percussion lock, muzzle loader with the barrels one above the other. The upper was rifled, about forty caliber, and the lower a smooth-bored shot-gun barrel. The most curious feature, however, was that while there was a hammer for each barrel, these hammers were both operated by a single-trigger.

The lock for the rifle barrel was the ordinary, top-action percussion lock, the sear being released by that spur of the trigger extending toward the butt of the piece; while the underneath hammer, firing the smooth-bored barrel, engaged directly with the forward spur of the trigger, the trigger-guard itself curling around and attaching with a clevis connection to this lower hammer and acting as a main-spring for it. A ramrod rested in clips on either side of the barrels and a recess to hold caps was hollowed into one side of the stock and closed by a hinged cover. On the other side were inlaid, in carved and hammered brass, the figures of a hunting dog and a crouching deer.

WE WERE so interested in our examination of this ancient weapon that we never noticed the approach of Lieutenant Martin until he was in our midst and looking, with us, at the gun in Ryan's hands.

"Carry on, men, carry on!" he said as our two-striper recognized him. He squatted by the fire and addressed Dan. "Ryan, I've left the old man digging into a meal at my tent. Spencer is out somewhere on a scout, so I can't talk to him. Who is this old long-hair, anyhow?"

"Sor," answered Dan, "he's been around this country since long before th' Civil War. He's called Pa-sappah as they say he was the fir-r-st white man to go into th' Black Hills, where th' Injuns say is th' home av the divil they call be thot name.

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"Th' shtory Oi've hear-r-d is thot he was th' only man left av a wagon-train thot was jumped be th' Injuns on Snake River back in th' 50's. He was hit on th' head and knocked simple-minded, an' he's been wanderin' around th' Dakotas iver since. He's har-r-mless except where Injuns are concerned, but let him see a buck wid th' warpaint on an' th' ould lad goes woild! Th' Injuns won't hu-r-t him 'cause they know he ain't just right in th' head an' 'tis th' wor-r-st kind av bad medicine to har-r-m a crazy man, but they give him a woide berth. Did ye take note, sor, av them two knives he carries in his belt?

"Them's th' only things he uses again th' Injuns. An' though they call th' cavalry th' Long Knives an' fear thim, yet they have more dread av thim daggers av his than av all th' sabers iver turned out av Rock Island. An' 'tis said he niver joins up wid a wagon-thrain or a cavalry outfit but that they get a foight. Not that that manes anything, f'r 'tis precious few thrains cross th' plains nowadays widout a shcrap av some koind."

He looked up quickly as a shadowy figure loomed out of the darkness and Pa-sappah joined the group about the fire. The men gave him plenty of room and I saw a couple cross themselves furtively.

The old man picked up a handful of sand and small twigs and, sweeping a clear space before him, began to lay the stuff down in little piles, mumbling unintelligibly to himself. From time to time he picked up more sand and added new heaps. No one interrupted him and Lieutenant Martin paid the closest attention to the work.

Finally Pa-sappah seemed to have the job completed to his satisfaction. He inspected it critically for a few minutes, then raised his head and addressed the officer:

"For I say unto you, I am come out of the wilderness to lead you into their secret places. Even as the Amalekites of old they sweep down to rob and slay and then go into the hills to prepare fresh abominations. Here—" and he indicated the relief map he had made in the sand—"are we now, and here—" the long fingers hovered over another portion—"have I watched them not three nights ago at their evil practises. And on the wings of the morning I came unto ye. Be of high heart, ye warriors of a just cause, for I will show ye the abiding-place of your enemies. And as a lion pounces upon a lamb, so will we strike them; scattering them like chaff before the threshing flails or as dust from beneath the wheels of the chariots. So! And so!"

Flinging his hands wide in a dramatic gesture he threw the remainder of the sand upon the earth.

"Be ye prepared to start, ye and your young men, with the light of morning," he directed the lieutenant; "for I am the flail of the Lord and the sword of Gideon to smite the unbelievers."

He rose, picked up his old gun from where it lay across Ryan's knees, and, dropping it in the crook of his arm, stalked off into the darkness.

The lieutenant directed us to turn in and get some sleep, adding an order that the map the old man had prepared be left undisturbed until Spencer could see it. Later in the night I wakened and saw the officer and the chief scout in earnest conference by our fire, Spencer's shaven face thrown into strong relief in the ruddy glow as he bent over the contours a crazy man had made.

Dan was very grave the next morning as we policed the camp and saddled for the march.

"I tell ye, Davy me lad, there'll be empty saddles goin' back to th' post, an th' two graves we filled lasht night will not be th' only ones we'll dig. Me ould mother, back in Ballyjamesduff, had th' sight an' I felt it mesilf in me dreams the night! Moind y'er eye, Davy, an' remimber thot thrick I showed ye av twistin' as ye thrust. Thot kapes th' blade from shtickin' an' bindin'."

For two days our bearded guide led us deeper and deeper into the Bad Lands, through coulee and wash and over ridge and shoulder. He knew that region as we knew the post drill-ground, for never did he lead us into country too rough for the horses or expose us against the sky-line. And, what is more in that arid section, he brought us to a water-hole each night!

To the lieutenant's suggestion that our advance into what was undoubtedly hostile country should be protected by an advance guard and flanking-parties the old man merely replied:

"There is no need for such precautions. The Hand of the Lord of Hosts is over us, shielding us from our enemies. 'For the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire.' "

At which Dan Ryan shrugged his shoulder

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and muttered: "Thot's all well an' good, me bully; but these are Sioux Injuns an' not Egyptians. Oi'd feel a sight better and me vittles would set easier f'r the prisince av a few Springfields along our flanks!"

ON THE third night after leaving the burned ranch on Tobacco Creek we camped in a well-watered valley between two almost precipitous hills. The word was passed along that there was to be no smoking, fires were prohibited, and we were to make out with cold rations.

"With the dawn we will strike," announced Pa-sappah, "I go forward now to peer upon the unbelievers."

He rose, stepped into the darkness, and was gone, crossing the post of the sentry like a cloud shadow over the face of the moon; and about ten o'clock appeared again as suddenly as he had departed.

"Two were set to watch the approaches to their place," he observed. "They are cut off—"he touched his pair of knives and the faintest shadow of a smile crossed his face—"as ripe grain before the scythe of the reaper. The dawning of the Last Great Day will find them still keeping their vigil."

He sat up for a while carefully rubbing the razor edges of his daggers with a small whetstone and inspecting the supply of patches and caps he carried for his ancient rifle. This concluded, he curled up in a saddle-blanket and dropped to sleep as peacefully as a baby.

Long before the first faint signs of another day grayed the east we were roused, gulped another hasty, cold meal, and saddled. We rode steadily through inky darkness for an hour or so and then were halted to wait the light while the lieutenant, Spencer, and Pa-sappah scouted ahead to the ridge overlooking the Sioux encampment.

They returned just as it began to dawn and the officer outlined the plans for the attack. It seemed that this little valley, hidden in the maze of coulees and ridges that make up the Bad Lands, had been selected by Yellow Eagle and his band in which to "make medicine" and to plan further forays against the isolated ranches. We might have combed the country for months without finding it, for it lay in a natural fold in the hills that one would never think existed.

Our commander's plan was the usual system of attack against Indian encampments: A sudden volley followed by a quick charge to stampede the ponies and complete the demoralization of the redskins, and then to fight dismounted, taking cover along the rocky slopes and each man firing at will whenever a feathered top-knot showed itself.

It's a good system for a surprize attack and has been worked out many times in actual combat, but this particular morning the surprize feature was not effective. We never learned whether one of their scouts had discovered us, or if they had found the bodies of the sentries that Pa-sappah had killed and thereby been warned of the presence of enemies; but when we topped the rise the encampment was wide awake, the horse-herd had been driven up, and the majority of the reds were already mounted.

The order was passed down the line and at the word we ripped a volley into them; then mounted and started down the slope.

"Trot!"

"Gallop!"

"CHARGE!"

And with the final command we swept in solid troop front upon the Indian band, hoofs thundering, sabers flashing, and the dust hanging like a yellow curtain behind us in the dim light!

Yellow Eagle was no mean commander. In the few moments that elapsed between our volley and the charge he got his band mounted and into some semblance of order. Foolishly, however, he elected to stand his ground instead of opening up and giving way before us, and no untrained force can meet, successfully, the frontal attack of trained men and, what is more, trained horses.

Knee to knee we poured —— -for-leather across the level space at the foot of the hill. Even above the roar of the charge I could hear old Dan, as cool as the proverbial cucumber, shouting some last-minute advice to me.

"Easy does it, b'y! A free wrist an' a firm arm! Cut down the fir-r-st thot faces ye an' ye're in position to get th' next wid a thrust. An' twist as ye make yer thrust!"

Then, with a crash that could be heard a mile, we hit 'em! I brought my heavy blade down upon one shaven head and saw the owner thereof lose his seat and fall over his horse's rump—how badly injured I did not know for the rush carried me past him and sent me carroming into another buck who slashed savagely at me with a stone-headed club. I shortened my grip and using

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the saber as a lance, put the point in his throat, bearing him off his pony by sheer weight and momentum. He carried my weapon with him as he fell, so I jerked my revolver out of the clumsy holster and used that in place of the sword.

Aside from those few vivid impressions received when "J" troop first struck Yellow Eagle's massed warriors, my recollection of that fight is only of a blind flurry in the dim light of early morning amid clouds of choking, biting dust; of squealing horses and cursing, yelling men, of the acrid smell of black powder sharp in my nostrils, of a painted, grimacing face thrust close to mine and of sticking the muzzle of my pistol against it and pulling the trigger; of something warm and smelly and sticky dripping over my hand and arm, and then, suddenly, of being free from the press about me and seeing the Indian band in scattered flight down the valley.

Riderless horses and dismounted men were everywhere, and a number of silent figures, not all of them Sioux, marked the ground over which the mêlée had raged. Sergeant Lewis, our top, appeared and blowing vigorously on his whistle, signaled the assembly.

The troopers gathered, and as the group grew larger our riderless horses cantered up and submitted to capture. Pete Spencer, the scout, joined us, his right arm hanging useless, broken by a blow from a war-club, and was followed closely by Dan Ryan. The Irishman's cap was gone and blood was pouring freely from a jagged rip in his scalp.

"Be th' Black Curse av Shielegh, b'ys," he roared, "th' red divvles have carried off the loo'tinint an' little Bennett! Git after thim, ser-r-geant, f'r th' love av —— Where's thot —— long-hair thot got us into this mess?"

In the few minutes while we were mustering our scattered forces and capturing loose horses the Indian band had gone about a third of a mile down the valley, but this lead was not increased much before we were hot after them, riding in a fan formation so that, as it happened, every man got a good view of the final act in the brief and bloody drama.

Yellow Eagle and his warriors had just come opposite the jutting point of rocks that masked the entrance to the valley when from behind the cover afforded by the granite cliff there dashed a single horseman.

White beard streaming back over his shoulders and the deep fringes of his buckskin suit snapping in the breeze, old Pa-sappah, "the flail of the Lord among the unbelievers," bore down on the redskins. The reins lay upon his pony's neck and in each hand he swung one of the short heavy knives so dreaded by the Sioux.

We could see the band hesitate and gather nervously about their leaders as the madman cut off their line of retreat. No Indian will harm a person whom Gitche Manitou has "touched," and for this reason the old man was inviolate despite the number of their friends and comrades he had slain.

With a final whirl of his gleaming weapons Pa-sappah disappeared in the midst of the band. We could see the lances wavering back and forth, arms rising and falling, the ponies prancing and shuffling; and then, as if shot from a cannon, two riders dashed out of the group and galloped toward us. The heavier cavalry horses were instantly recognizable, even if the attire of the men had not shown they were Lieutenant Martin and Bennett, the troop bugler, slightly mussed up and with their arms bound by rawhide thongs, but otherwise unharmed.

Scarcely pausing to slash their bonds we continued our charge. The fight, if you could so designate Pa-sappah's lone-hand raid, was over, and the Indians were again strung out in wild flight out of the fatal valley, scattering in every direction as they escaped from the narrow pass.

Four motionless figures remained on the ground to mark the spot of the heroic rescue. Three of them were Indians, and of the three one was Yellow Eagle himself, his throat ripped open from ear to ear by a stroke of the old-timer's dagger. Near him, with sightless eyes staring into the blue sky, was Pa-sappah, a feather-bedecked lance through his chest.

Lieutenant Martin dismounted and bent over his rescuer, but presently rose, shaking his head gravely.

"He's gone, men," he stated. "And we'll bury him right here where he died in saving Bennett and me from death at a Sioux torture-stake. Yellow-Eagle and the other two shall be his escort of honor to the Other Side. Sergeant, will you detail two men to return to camp for tools, and while the grave is being prepared you and I will look

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through his clothes to see if there is anything that might tell who he was. He might have people somewhere who should be notified."

WHILE Anderson and Murray were gone for the spades the top and the officer reverently searched the pockets of the stained and worn buckskin suit. Their quest was rewarded by a yellowed envelope which the lieutenant opened, withdrawing several folded papers. He spread them on his knee for a more thorough examination, and we heard him hiss sharply in astonishment. Lewis and Dan Ryan peered over his shoulder at the documents.

"Howly ——," exclaimed the Irishman, "the auld man was a bobtail, sor!"

Natural curiosity drew us closer. The lieutenant looked up and, seeing our interested faces, passed the papers around so that we all could have a chance to examine them.

There were two of them, a court-martial order and a dishonorable discharge from the United States Army. In terse military phraseology they announced that Corporal John H. Barton, Ninety-ninth Infantry, had been found guilty by a drumhead court-martial of cowardice in the face of the enemy, he having been stationed in an advanced post during the siege of Chapultepec and, when two of his men were killed and the third wounded by enemy fire, he derserted the post, left the injured man, and sought safety in the rear. On account of the soldier's high-strung, nervous nature the court was merciful and did not condemn him to death, but he was listed a coward and drummed out of the army.

A hush fell over us as we realized the import of these documents and thought of the almost fanatical courage and self-sacrifice the one-time coward had displayed.

The lieutenant broke the silence, speaking that which was in all our minds, his words punctuated by the thud of pick and scrape of shovel as the sun-baked ground was broken for Pa-sappah's last resting-place.

"Men, it is not for us to inquire into the circumstances that brought about this man's separation from the service. We can judge him only by what we have ourselves seen. He gave his life that others might live and in his death he vindicated himself. Regardless of how he lived, he died a brave man. I shall see that the authorities in Washington receive a complete report of this fight and the part played by this man. And as far as I am concerned I am going to see that he gets a soldier's funeral along with those others of our comrades who fell in the fighting this morning."

The graves prepared, we brought down the bodies of the five other men who had been killed in the charge and there, in that quiet valley in the Bad Lands, we laid them down for their last long sleep.

Pa-sappah's tomb was a little apart from the rest and upon it we heaped the lances, shields, and other weapons of the Sioux we gathered from the field of battle.

The names of each of the men were scratched on the rough crosses we placed above them, and in addition to the name Dan Ryan carved on the one over Pa-sappah's grave the words quoted by Lieutenant Martin when he spoke briefly to the troop.

"Men, this is no occasion for an oration. We are soldiers and we lay these our comrades in a soldier's grave. Let us hope that when our time comes we die as gloriously. And the life and brave death of this other brother-in-arms, who was one of us for a little time, can teach us one great lesson that we should each of us remember all through life; the words of another Man who gave His Life for us— 'Judge not, that ye be not judged!' "

For a long minute he stood at the salute, then turned and signaled the firing squad. The three volleys ripped out and as the last crashing echo died away little Bennett, for the second time on this expedition, raised his bugle to his lips. This time there was no interruption. Crystal clear, the sweet, sad notes of the soldier's requiem rang out and, echoing from the surrounding cliffs, hovered like a benediction in the air:

When your last
Day is past,
From afar
Some bright star
O'er your grave
Watch will keep,
While you sleep
With the brave.

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A SHOT AT A VENTURE

A THREE-PART STORY CONCLUSION

by Captain Dingle

Author of "The Burial of Billy," "Joe Monkeyface," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

NEW GUINEA is the largest and most fascinating of the few remaining unexplored spots of the world. Upon its cold mountains-tops, in the steaming shadows of its jungles, upon the swollen surface of its swift mysterious rivers—anything is possible. Within its interior is still locked the secret of immeasurable riches—locked by the poison of its swamps and the untamed ferocity of the cannibals who swarm in its jungles.

Three nations have seized a foothold here—Great Britian, Holland, and Germany.

But the greatest power in the land, at the time "Red" Saunders, skipper of the *Black Pearl*, appeared at Finschaven, was Nuanou, paramount chief of all the cannibal tribes of the unexplored *Hinterland*.

Only one man had made any advance into Nuanou's domain—Herman Neuman, a German, who had discovered rich gold deposits near the headwaters of the Kaiserin Augusta River.

After a terrific fist fight with Red Saunders in the depths of the jungle, with the concession to the diggings as the stake, he had lost out to the Britisher, and renounced his claim in favor of the adventurous skipper.

With this excuse to penetrate a savage country, and spurred on by fabulous accounts of the richness of Nuanou's throne, Saunders set forth on a private expedition that was destined to disturb the Governments of three great powers.

At Finschaven he left behind Herr Koesch, an administrator, murdered and unaccounted for, and an unknown white enemy from whom he had rescued Jacky, a badly beaten native.

Saunders had boldly sailed with his mate, Tod Carter, for Port Moresby to obtain the sanction of the British authorities to the proposed expedition—had gone to sea in defiance of German authority—sailed away with two strange passengers below deck with him.

The first of these, Robert Venneker, was an Englishman of great physical power whom Saunders had known at Eton when they were boys. Through drink he had sunk to the level of a beachcomber—and lower, though never forgetting that he was the only man who'd ever whipped Saunders in fair fight.

Saunders, for his part, could not disguise his contempt for this moral wreck, though at the same time his sympathy for his degenerate schoolmate recognized no limits; for he believed Venneker might some day become a man again.

The second passenger lay hidden below deck until the *Black Pearl* reached the limits of the British dominion.

The pursuing German patrol was overhauling the schooner, and Saunders leaned over the rail to scan the waters ahead.

Suddenly a figure rose behind him—a figure with a dark face split across with a cruel gash of a mouth—rose in silence from the hatchway and like a snake slashed twice with a crooked blade at the broad back of the unsuspecting skipper.

Having struck, the assassin leaped overboard and swam to the German ship.

An instant later Venneker also plunged into the water—but swam shoreward, where he disappeared into the jungle.

Faithful Tod Carter brought the schooner safely into Port Moresby; and in due time Red Saunders recovered.

The delay, however, had been dangerous, for the Germans demanded Saunders' extradition.

The skipper escaped serious complications only by slipping away with his crew in the *Black Pearl* and ascending the estuary of the Fly River hoping to escape any restraint the Resident might intend to put on him.

Before escaping Saunders established a strong bond of friendship with a Dutchman named Oopdyke whose life he had saved by a timely but rough operation.

Jacky, too, had met an old friend in Chief "Long." This old savage became strongly attached to Saunders because of the magic he was believed to control. Long was a repulsive old cannibal, wrinkled, slack-lipped, hideously scarred—but a fighting man, with a bodyguard of filthy, but stalwart, warriors.

The first day of their ascent of the Fly River,

"A Shot at a Venture," copyright, 1922, by A. E. Dingle.

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between dark, dripping forests of jungle growth, Saunders took a party ashore to investigate a plume of smoke that rose out of the forest in front of them.

As they approached, the scream of an anguished man pierced the silence of the jungle. Rushing blindly forward, the boat's crew burst upon a scene of terrible cannibalism, with a white man, a living victim, being turned slowly on a spit before a raging fire.

"Venneker!" choked Saunders. "Let drive, men!"

After a terrific fight Venneker was rescued, and Saunders' party managed to withdraw to the ship.

The next day the ship itself was attacked with great ferocity, and almost captured. The crowded deck seethed with mad fighting.

At the crisis of the combat, fifty fresh, grinning, demoniacal faces appeared over the side.

Old Chief Long had arrived with reenforcements—and the ship was swept clear of the enemy.

That night the Dutchman, Oopdyke, also joined them, bringing information that the jungle was full of strange savages—and Neuman had gone back to his holdings, despite his agreement.

While Saunders was pondering these new difficulties, a twofold interruption came—a pealing yell from Venneker; and, from the shore, a native voice shrilling the news that a Government boat was pursuing them up the river.

VENNEKER had not been burned badly enough to remain an invalid, but he had managed to break into the liquor, and was soon gone with the madness of drunken delirium. During the night, however, after showing evidence of recovery and remorse, he disappeared in the jungle with Jacky, his old servant.

Ronald Moncrief, a missionary, was the first to encounter him on his way to meet the cannibal chief Aau. Aau with his painted savages greeted Venneker as their returned chief. Horrified, Moncrief protested, and was smashed in the face with a rifle butt and left lying on the ground, smothered in blood.

In the meantime Baldwin, the British Resident, overtook the *Black Pearl*, but retired, startled by the hostility of the natives, down-stream for a stronger force.

Guided by Horatius, a local native, Saunders led his party in pursuit of Venneker and recaptured him after a fight in which Moncrief nearly succeeded in strangling his enemy.

Despite all evidence against his old schoolmate, Saunders still stubbornly refused to believe him beyond redemption, even after he learned that Venneker was really the murderer of Koesch.

At this point Oopdyke left the expedition to make his way into Dutch territory. Saunders concealed the *Black Pearl*, and the party struck off through the bush to the higher land of the interior.

Here they were again attacked, and the mysterious Arab was at last killed by Venneker and Saunders together.

That night, as they sat by the camp-fire, exhausted, Tod Carter suddenly jumped to his feet.

"Look!" he grunted. "Right under the moon! Ain't that a white man?"

CHAPTER XXIV

RETURN OF OOPDYKE

JUST for one instant the skipper hesitated, for he was disposed to avoid breaking in on Long's feast now that it was too late to stop it and the more gruesome preliminaries had been already carried out beyond his ken or power of interference. His momentary hesitation was due to the fact that the man advancing to meet him had the moonlight at his back, thereby leaving his face in a black shadow; but then something in his hoppity-lickety gait seemed to render his face as brightly unshaded as if illumined by a beam of white light.

"Oopdyke!" exclaimed the skipper, leaping forward with hand extended.

"Ret Saunders, jou oldt rascal!" the response came in the big Dutchman's well-known gutturals. "Dis is a hellufa pissness jou've started now, py Chiminy! Vhy in der ——'s name didn't jou wipe der whole —— lot oudt ven jou started? Now dere's a dozen deer-footed savitches running like streaks ouf light to start somet'ing vot jou nor I can't schtop mitout artillery!"

"S-sh!" warned Saunders, pointing down at the cannibal orgy.

"Pouf!" retorted Oopdyke. "I haf dem vatched an hour past. Dot aindn't nothing to me. Der pissness dot I deplore iss dot jou perhaps schtopped oldt Longa, dere, killing all ouf der party dot busted in on jour camp. Ain't dot mad Venneker come to life yet? Ain't he toldt jou nothing? Jou ain't forgot Neuman, haf jou?"

"Oh, come down to the camp!" the skipper said, leading on. He was more than weary of this mystery surrounding Venneker. Now seemed the time to clear it up, but, upon arrival at camp, Venneker lay beyond any power to force him to speak for some time to come.

"How long has he been like this?" Saunders questioned the Islander watching over him. Oopdyke glowered down at the cot as if dubious about the genuine nature of that swoon-like sleep.

"Him go fo' sleep one-half hour, cappen. Some time he wake up——"

"Troublesome?"

"No, sar. Him say him wantchee spik wid you, cappen, bery 'special, and he talk like nudder man altogerrer."

Oopdyke shook his head and grunted:

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"Dot mans iss eider apoudt to gif oop der ghost, or else he's yoost apoudt to start to really get vell, cap'n. Rader I should think he's kicking off, judging py der gaudy life he's led. Dot's vot I'm going to speak apoudt now, in case he don't recover. Not many mans would do as much for him as you haf, Saunders. How much do you know apoudt him?"

"Not much, lately. Knew him well years ago, of course——"

"*Ja!* Und ve both know dot he chose to trafel mit cannibals. How much ouf dot——?"

"Not much, I said. Say, Oopdyke, the thing I want most to know is this: How long was Venneker really a cannibal himself?"

"Aa-h!"

The big Dutchman expelled a long, deep breath, and regarded Saunders with shrewd eyes. Where, a moment before, his plump, red face had worn an expression of uncertainty, as if pausing before making some very unpleasant revelation to a man about an acquaintance, now he smiled as if relieved vastly.

"Aa-h, mine dear friend, dot oxcuses me much trouble. So efen dot didn't escape jour sharp eyes, hey? Den listen. I vill mineselluf tell ouf Venneker vot I yoost heard back yonder from der government feller mit Baldvin."

"Where?" snapped the skipper sharply.

"No danger," grinned Oopdyke. "I trafel fast, und t'ree days ago I crossed der track ouf der little mans dot is oudt for your scalp. Der government chap is different. He says he's got der right efidence, und he'll carry on, now he's been interrupted in his proper work, until he takes pack der man dot made der rumpus in Finschaven.

"But Venneker. Der man turned drunk first, den mit dope vent crasey und choined a tribe ouf cannibals as a great white chief. He picked many a rib, too, but only ven under drugs, I truly pelieve. Vell, dot started oop in der Sherman territory, und it got to Koesch's ears und gif him a hold ofer Venneker. Dot vhite cannibal done many a dirty bit of vork so dot his segret should be kept.

"Den come along a chob dot efen Venneker kicked apoudt, und it concerned yourselluf, skipper. Koesch threatened to squeal on him, Venneker vent all to picces mit rage, und Koesch's Arab handy man heard der quarrel."

"So that's why Venneker killed Koesch," put in Saunders, musingly. "Put himself in a beastly mess rather than play me a rotten trick, then tried to make out that he believed I was the murderer! You thought I was it, too, didn't you?"

"*Ja*, und so did Baldvin und der government man until Venneker spilled der beans himselluf in delirium. Den, now iss der mystery vhy dot foolish feller dot can do so different t'ings good und bad turned panicky und difed oferboard vhen he saw der Arab making for dot patrol steamer in der Louisiades. How's dot, Ret?"

Saunders considered for several minutes, frowning darkly. But he had launched out with Venneker's story, as he knew it, and Oopdyke obviously knew as much more, therefore repression now at such a stage seemed useless.

"As I see it, in the light of later events," he said, "he dived overboard because for the first time he saw that Arab, and feared that the news must surely be carried to the patrol boat that the real murderer of Koesch was aboard my ship and it wasn't me. Apparently the Arab kept that quiet, or had orders to get me, and not Venneker; or perhaps it was a personal matter between the Arab and Venneker, only to be settled in a personal fashion, for even now I can't imagine any very warm attachment between Koesch and the Arab or Venneker to induce real loyalty."

"Und der Arab jou let go!" muttered Oopdyke, sorrowfully. "Dot is der —— ouf it, py Chames!"

"Yes, go to Paradise!" retorted Saunders. "I didn't let 'em make a long pig of him, because I wanted to show Venneker his dead body when he wakes up, but——"

"Py der lifin' powers ouf—! Oh, jou don't say jou got der crawling yellow-skin?"

"There he is," replied the skipper, nodding toward a leaf-covered body lying not far from Venneker's couch.

"Den t'ings is not so bad."

Oopdyke got up from the log he sat on and stumped around the clearing to restart the circulation in his crippled leg, chuckling all the while increasingly. When he halted beside Saunders again he was shaking with some tremendous inner mirth and his blue eyes glinted in the reflection from the fire.

"I am trespassing here," he said with a slow, shrewd smile. "Der Baldvin party

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toldt me I must get into Holland territory as qvick as possible, because it vas being talked apoudt dot I haf der Sherman government offended und dey didn't want to be mixed up in our troubles. Der government man said he had troubles ouf his own with a scoundrel ouf a skipper called Ret Saunders.

"So I promised him, und toldt him dot I would gladly turn me der face de odder vay und let him cross der Holland poundry if he missed you in der Strickland Rifer."

Oopdyke rumbled with soft laughter.

"Dot leedle mans looked at me as if he vould like mine tripes to eat, py chiminy! How did you make him so mad, Ret?"

Red briefly told of the passage of the river, while the big Hollander shook with mirth. But the rising howls from Long's barbecue reminded both men that other matters must be attended to, and the flying remnants of the Arab's party might at any moment produce trouble.

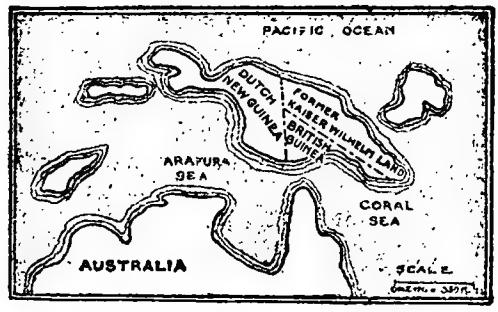
"Vell, vell," the Dutchman said, glancing up at a distant height on which a will o' the wisp seemed to play erratically. "I suppose land und sea, or water, iss fery different. Here jou are, arrifed in der middle ouf der worst country in der vorld for travel, coming py vater mitout accident, und straightway camping in der silliest place ouf der whole plessed island. So soon dem hungry cannibals fill oop to der gullet, jou shall strike camp und come to mine leedle snuggery in der hills."

"But we're nowhere near your lines, are we?" asked Saunders, unwilling to believe all the Dutchman said about his choice of a camp site.

"No. Here it iss yoost so far avay from der Holland line, der Sherman line, or at least der joonction mit all der poundaries, und der territory vhere old Nuanou sits on dot gorcheous throne mit dem big splay feet ouf his resting on der precious footschtool desired py Ret Saunders. But—" Oopdyke suddenly grew serious—"also is it not so far avay from der place vhere Herman Neuman iss vaiting to get efen mit jou, mine oldt friendt, und vhere vaits der fate ouf t'ree territories. Der Arab—did he show not'ing to jou?"

"The Arab's followed us right up from the sea. I caught sight of him and his painted savages, in that thunderstorm I got lost in. How can he have anything to do with Neuman or boundaries or you?"

"Der Arab iss det now, but he did his work pefore jour big paws proke his —— neck. Efery yard he has kept track ouf jou, und only because he didn't know I left jou haf I got so fast along mine own journey. For that I thank jou. Vhy did he pring cannibals out of Sherman Papua through British territory? Vhy did jou find Venneker made a long pig ouf himself, vhen ve know he iss or vas a —— cannibal himselluf? Answer me dot, Red Saunders, und I vill qvick come back mit der retort courteous."



"Go on, spill it," suggested the skipper, impatiently.

"Vell, der whole British territory now iss seething mit eructions, because stranger tribes haf passed along, burning villages, cooking mans, killing children und cattle, leafing as dey go der plessedest lies apoud der English, und saying dot der Shermans shall soon come down und make ouf every Englisher a long pig for a real feast.

"Und Venneker, vot all der southern cannibals knew for one ouf demsellufs, he vos trussed up, alife, too, mind jou, because he stumbled on dem strange cannibals und made himselluf known as one ouf dem. Much better it vould haf been to leafe Venneker pehint in der voods. Look here!"

Oopdyke stopped abruptly, dived into his cavernous pockets, and produced a lump of raw gold as big as a walnut.

"Dere's a ton ouf it, lying retty to pick up, und in mine country's territory und jours, und Herman Neuman alretty has shifted dose poundary marks und is digging!"

CHAPTER XXV

NUANOU

GLOOMY ravines and dead forests characterized the higher shoulders of the mountain range in which Oopdyke had established his quarters. The skipper at

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once realized the truth of the charge that he had chosen his camp-site badly; and by means of the small boat sextant and artificial horizon he carried with him he speedily determined the position of the Dutchman's hiding-place to be well within British territory. From the highest peak, in daylight, he could look out over a vast expanse of forbidding country, fully forty miles in any direction, well covering all the imaginary boundary lines of three powers.

North the land fell away gradually to that mysterious region to which he was bound, to his leasehold, to the place of old Nuanou. That way, also, though nearer, Herman Neuman awaited his coming, according to Oopdyke. Behind lay the trickling brook that became the Strickland river lower down, and farther west lay Dutch territory, and the Fly River; between him and the river a government party lurked, somewhere, and their object was to stretch somebody's neck roughly by means of a rope.

Saunders was astonished at the completeness of Oopdyke's camp. That will-o'-the-wisp light he had seen on the previous night high on the crest, proved to be actually many miles away, and morning had come before they completed the transfer of baggage and stores, with the sick man. They stumbled in the darkness through a deserted village, where lean dogs howled and fought over gruesome scraps among the ruined huts. Tiny clearings, where vegetables and fruit had grown recently, lay waste and desolate.

"Dot is vhy I made mine hetquarters here," remarked Oopdyke as they ascended. "Dem strangers dot jou joost fought off done all dot damage, und jou get der credit. I toldt jou dot efery one ouf dem strange savages ought to haf been croaked. But here we are. Put Venneker in der dry cave, und share der little one wit' me."

As dawn turned the frowning mountains to rosy pink, the camp could be seen clearly as a perfect bit of Nature's handiwork adapted by a clever old fox of the wild lands. Around a triangular peak, that spiked up out of a natural rampart of shattered boulders like a cone out of a crater, cracks in the rocky face proved on investigation to be entrances into cozy little nooks where two or three men and their gear might snuggle in more or less comfort if shelter became necessary.

A trickle of crystal water dripped cool and sweet down one side of the peak; from a perfectly formed natural armchair at the extreme summit a lookout always scanned the approach on all sides.

"Und now I make jou a present ouf der works," smiled the Dutchman. "Mine own men vill mix wit' yours, all right, und it is better for jou to be boss ouf a camp in jour own country's territory dan a Dutchman, *ja*. It is for jou I haf made der camp ready. Now put der mans to sleep, und vhen der sun goes oudt der middle ouf der sky from I shall show jou Herman Neuman at vork, und so I shall show jou vhere is old Nuanou."

When the camp lay silent in heavy sleep, and only the sharp eyes of the lookouts gave hint of life in their motionless forms, old Tod Carter, who had flung himself down outside the entrance to Venneker's quarters, was awakened by a gentle shake and opened his eyes to glare, and his mouth to growl at the unwelcome disturber of his well-earned rest.

"Better get back to bed!" he muttered, meeting the intense gaze of the sick man close to his face.

"Don't make a blooming row!" whispered Venneker harshly. "Don't rouse all hands, you old idiot; I'm sane, and clear in my head for once. I want information."

Carter glanced around uneasily. Any information given out in the camp must come from the skipper; more particularly information such as he suspected Venneker sought.

"Ask the Old Man when he wakes up," he returned, and composed himself to sleep again.

"Wake up!" Venneker tugged savagely at him. "Listen, you glorious old lump o' loyalty, I want to do a good turn for your beloved skipper in return for what he's done for me——"

"Huh! Sell him to some —— old cannibal?" grunted Tod.

The expression that flitted over Venneker's pale face frightened him. It passed, however, and the insistent voice was still kept in the compass of a whisper.

"No, Carter. I'm finished. No more of that, or anything else, much, for me. I'm slipping, and I know it. Tell me where Oopdyke pointed out Neuman's hang-out. I heard him, but couldn't see where he indicated."

Carter got up, his grim old face stony in

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expression, and gently turned Venneker about to urge him back to his mattress.

"You go back to bed," he said. "No runaway trips for you. When you're fit and well, the skipper'll let you visit Neuman."

Venneker swung around furiously, revealing unsuspected strength, sick though he had been and still was. He flung off Tod Carter's hand easily, but restrained the rage that had all but mastered him.

"Carter, I give you my word of honor—Oh, —— you! I have a shred left! Don't grin like that, or you'll have a scrap on hand. I give you my word of honor I don't want to leave this camp against orders. I promise you I won't run away, and that my desire to know whereabouts Neuman is located is entirely in the skipper's interests. Now will you tell me?"

Prompted more by weariness than by conviction, Tod flung out his hand toward the north-east, where, in the blinding sun of early forenoon a bald granite summit rose out of the forest like a barren rock from a sea of green. Venneker stood for several moments gazing at the spot, then seemed to be measuring the intervening distance, for his pallid face and sunken eyes wore a look of despair; but suddenly he made a wry grimace, turned away, and walked slowly to his cavern with a ghastly grin taking the place of the despairing look.

He stumbled at the entrance, but pulled himself up by gripping the rocky sides and there he swayed for a few seconds.

"Here, swig on this!" grunted Carter, running to him with outstretched canteen. "Rum!" he said.

Venneker seized the canteen in trembling hands, unstoppered it with his teeth and spat out the stopper. The canteen was empty when he handed it back.

"Thanks, old chap," he whispered. "You and old Red make a good pair. I shall remember this."

He walked inside the cave with steady step, and Tod heard him stretch out on the mattress and subside into dead silence before he permitted himself to doze off again.

THE sun passed meridian, leaving the eastern slopes in grateful shade where blinding glare had ruled before, and the fringe of the woodland was but a short march away. As Saunders strode briskly downhill with Tod Carter and Oopdyke, followed by only three men, one *Black Pearl* seaman, one of Long's men, and one of Oopdyke's own followers, all armed, but unostentatiously, he wondered what was keeping Tod Carter so quiet. Never yet had he known the grumbling, sarcastic, splendidly loyal old mate to pass a chance to utter some sort of growl when his sea-sure feet were carrying his sea-wise legs over or through such damnable obstacles as loose stones hidden under tough, rope-like creepers.

"Tell y' what," Tod suddenly burst out; "I been an' done a bloomin' smart stunt, I have! Sink me f'r a swab-bellied old loonatic, if I ain't. Ought to have told y' right away, but th' smooth duck got me to believin' him wi' his word o' honor, and sich truck!"

"What on earth is biting you?" frowned Saunders.

Things promised to be quite merry enough without secrets in camp.

"Why, that Venneker! Come to me 'e did, an' ——"

Tod rapidly recounted every word and action that had passed in his brief encounter with Venneker, and wound up by emphasizing that grin on the sick man's face, and his shameful capacity for rum.

"Said you an' me was a fine pair, 'e did, and said he'd never forget us. Holy sufferin' Moses! I ought to have told yuh right away. Now we've started, an' 'e's back there wi' all the camp gear and all the camp men, old Long and all his chaps jest crammed full o' long pig, wi' the taste in their big yappers again, and——"

"Did Venneker give you his word of honor?" asked Saunders quietly.

"A blurry lot o' good that is!"

"Did he?"

"Sure 'e did—twice—and told me I'd have a scrap on my 'ands if I grinned when he said so. Word o'——"

"Then the camp's safe," returned Saunders, and proceeded on the march without another backward glance.

Far into the evening they kept on, Oopdyke apparently sure of his route. Stars came out, and far away backward that will-o'-the-wisp flickering light winked high in the sky where rose the crest of their camp site. Right on through the night the Dutchman led them, never wavering from his course, never in doubt; until, when the eastern stars paled and the black velvet of

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the night gave way to the gray silken mantle of morning, he led the way across a natural rock bridge over an appalling chasm and halted on the far side.

"Dere jou are, mine friendt," he said, mopping his red face and rumpling his hair. "Here I schall meet jou again. Now I go on mine own affairs for a leedle vhile. See dot big stone? Dot's der mark. From der camp it can be seen. From Nuanou's village it is in sight, und from der diggin's ouf Herman Neuman. Go to it, und jou vill see der path to Nuanou, but long pefore jou get there vill jou see der outposts ouf der oldt chief. Treat him vell, Ret, or a long pig he makes ouf jou und oldt Tod Carter mitout hesitation."

Now within reach, almost sight, of the mysterious old chief, Saunders experienced one of his rare moments of caution. What sort of man would this Papuan chief turn out to be? To have spread his name and fame not only to all corners of Papua, that *terra incognita*, but to the four corners of the seven seas too, he must be a sort of super-cannibal-man.

Before starting off on that last short leg of the march, Saunders made his two men examine their packs, as he and Tod did with theirs, making sure that nothing he had brought was missing or lost; then he set out with every faculty alert, primed with curiosity about that famous throne and footstool.

As Oopdyke had warned him, before the great round stony hummock was reached, men appeared from the shadows of hill and jungle and halted him. These men were hideously painted, and warlike in aspect, yet they possessed no weapons except stone axes, stone-tipped spears, and the most primitive of bows.

The skipper noticed, however, that the arrows for those primitive bows were beautifully feathered and barbed, straight as a true line; and on closer inspection he saw, too, that the bows, though primitive in structure, were powerful and evenly balanced, with strings of finely plaited sennet that looked as if the cunningest fingers in the world had spent a lifetime over the making of each.

As they halted before the outposts, Tod and the skipper saw coming toward them from the blue depths of the winding forest paths a procession which made their two followers gasp and forced a start of surprize from the skipper himself.

First stepped six blacks a full half-foot taller than any Papuan ever seen before. Then came the bearers of a tremendous piece of furniture: twelve men, three at each end of two poles that looked as if cut for telegraph poles. On the poles a platform swung, a platform on which was fastened a gorgeous seat that might have come straight from the band-wagon of a circus. On the seat a being sat.

Its body was clad in royal purple, its head was bowed down under the weight of a heavily metaled hat, its feet sank into the soft cushion of a footstool rivaling the throne in gorgeous ornamentation. In the creature's hand was a highly polished, ultra modern rifle, of equally ultra worthlessness. The creature spoke.

"It's old Nuanou!" muttered the skipper.

"A bloomin' Liverpool Jew!" old Tod blurted out aloud, his mouth agape at the tawdry vision.

"Shut up!" growled Saunders, angrily. "If he is that, it's butter, not bluster we have to feed him. Come on, let's talk to him."

CHAPTER XXVI

A SHOT AT A VENTURE

ONLY the creature seated in that gorgeous chair had spoken, and what he said was unintelligible to Saunders or either of the two blacks left with him. Oopdyke had taken his own man with him on leaving, and neither the seaman nor Long's man understood the queer ejaculation with which Nuanou greeted the intruders.

"Good day, chief," the skipper said, smiling his sunniest.

Tod Carter swore soulfully, but acceded to his skipper's request to try to look less like a hangman and assume some semblance of pleasant harmlessness. The strange occupant of that too gaudy throne on poles replied in a fashion that surprized Saunders but only made old Tod mutter below his breath—

"I told y' so!"

"Good day, Red Saunders," the chief said, without a trace of emotion or surprize. "Let me see your rifle, please."

The English was good, perfect in an ordinary way. One whitish-yellow hand came out from the purple robe, and the beady eyes glittered in a manner that warned against irritating the owner of them.

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Saunders handed over his repeating rifle without a word, grinning cheerfully as he slyly slipped on the safety.

The gun the old chief carried was highly polished, and of a famous make, but the skipper had seen in the first glance that whoever had donated that part of his equipment to Nuanou had taken the precaution first to burr down the hammer indicator so that the gun could never be cocked. His own rifle was a good old companion of many a trip, battle worn and lacking outside polish; but at a pinch it would pick off a man at a thousand yards, and blow a hole in him so big that there could be no doubt whatever about his soul quitting his mortal clay. He shuddered slightly at the thought of what possibilities he was placing in the old ruffian's yellow claw.

Nuanou examined the gun narrowly, suddenly lifted the muzzle until it covered one of his escort, and pulled on the trigger. His face writhed in fury as the piece failed to explode, and he scowled at Saunders wickedly.

"I'll show you, chief."

The skipper reached for the gun, slipped the safety unseen, aimed swiftly at a small kangaroo leaping over the bushes fifty paces away, and brought it down with a flying shot. Nuanou's eyes gleamed hungrily as he reached out again to take the gun, on which the safety was once more at "safe."

"It won't shoot if it's used badly," Saunders smiled. "If you try to shoot a man who hasn't done anything wrong, the gun won't shoot, see?"

Nuanou still reached for the rifle, at the same time offering his own damaged weapon in exchange. The skipper repressed the inclination to refuse, knowing well that he stood in a precarious situation; he passed over his beloved old gun, and accepted the other, with a low bow.

"The chief does me honor," he said. "It was to make presents that I came. How about going up to your village, chief?"

Tod Carter's eyes never left the glittering gauds of the chair and footstool. The ornamentation on both might well cause an old sailor sleepless nights. As for the chief's escort, he gave them little attention; he only saw that they looked rather more murderous than any he had yet seen; for the rest he resigned himself to what patience he could muster, and thanked his lucky stars that his own rifle hung down inside his pants, gripped by his field belt.

Nuanou was playing with his new rifle like a boy with a new air-gun, and only muttered in answer. But immediately he ceased muttering his bodyguard commenced a slowly revolving procession about the intruders, and the bearers picked up the poles and joined in as their turn came around, gradually shoving the skipper's party forward along the path from which the chief had come, in the center of a guard that increased momentarily and effectually prevented any but the skipper, who stood inches taller than any other man there, from seeing enough of the road to recognize it again.

Nuanou meddled with the mechanism of his rifle incessantly. He was like a monkey with a sewing machine. Every few paces he would hand it to Saunders and demand that he make it shoot. Once or twice the skipper took a shot at something near-by, until there remained only one cartridge in the chamber and the magazine was empty. Then he handed it back with the assurance that it would not shoot for a bad purpose.

Nuanou puzzled over it as the procession wound through the thickly jungle-clad débris of some primeval upheaval of a mountain, and gradually anger reddened his eyes, his lips parted in a vicious snarl.

"You make it shoot," he snapped, peremptorily. "If you can't make it shoot for me I'll have your head dried for my wives' hut."

The tone, the language, the expression and accent were all in accordance with Tod Carter's first appraisal of the old chief. He spoke as much like a Liverpool Hebrew as possible; with closed eyes it might easily have been imagined that the hearer was before the dark den of some slop-clothing shark in Paradise Street. The skipper shot a keen glance at him as he took the rifle.

"You've been a long time out of Liverpool, chief," he said softly. "You don't know the wonderful inventions that have come up in the last few years. See, I can shoot it."

He again fired at a boulder on a ridge fifty yards away, bringing the great stone tumbling down in a shower of dust. "But you want to shoot somebody for nothing, and the gun won't do that. See, I juggle the little fellow, and let you try. Here. Shoot at me, old chap."

In handing the gun back he left off the

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safety, knowing well enough that his last cartridge had just been expended. Grinning like a fiend, Nuanou, suddenly clapped the muzzle to the skipper's broad chest and pulled. There was a click, but no more, and Saunders laughed in the old scoundrel's bewildered face.

"Now let's forget gunning awhile, and wait until you and I can chat by ourselves," he said. "I bring presents, but you can't get 'em unless I give 'em to you. I want something you've got, too; and I want to know a lot of things that puzzle me now. What say, shall we get along?"

THE march proceeded in silence, Nuanou ever glancing sidewise at Saunders with mingled doubt and cunning in his eyes. Saunders returned the glance many times, always with a cheerful grin; and more and more was he brought to see how near old Tod Carter had gone to the mark when he first described the chief. If ever a Hebrew face was set upon a savage body, it was when Nuanou was molded. And the strange appearance reminded the skipper irresistibly of King Solomon, when taken in conjunction with the barbaric splendors of that throne and footstool. He was forced to chuckle at the conceit, and Tod Carter glowered up at him. Saunders murmured the thought.

"Huh! 'Cause he's so different, I s'pose!" grunted Tod. "Looks to me a whole lot more like Nebuchadnezzar just before he started grazing! Look at the monkey chops of him as he fiddles about with that gun!"

"Don't look so much at that, and more at what he's seated on," Saunders rejoined in a low voice, and then was startled into silence as the path suddenly opened out on the brink of a seemingly impassable chasm.

"Follow closely," Nuanou grinned maliciously, as his bearers walked straight over the edge of the precipice on to a zig-zag goat trail scarcely wide enough for two men abreast, without that unwieldy chair on poles.

Opposite, a little lower down, a vast assembly of savages stood before the entrance to a cleft in the wall of rock, and they greeted the chief with low mutterings of welcome.

"Keep your nerve, boys!" the skipper warned, stepping after the bearers without a trace of uneasiness, though in truth he was dubious about the wisdom of that step. Tod followed, then the seaman, and old Long's man last of the Saunders party. None of Nuanou's people appeared in the least aware that there was any unusual feature about that cliff trail, though Tod Carter was induced to go on only through sheer loyalty to his skipper.

"Skipper," he grumbled, "I sailed in deep-water square-riggers, an' could run out on a tops'l yard from tie to lifts without ketchin' holt; but blast me if this ain't like walkin' a bloomin' tight-rope over the bottomless pit!"

Down they scrambled, and the teetering chair at times seemed bound to go over the brink; yet Nuanou sat as calm and tremorless as if his chair were founded on solid granite, and never did he quit playing with his newly acquired gun. Once he raised it to his shoulder, prodded one of the bearers in the back, and tried to pull the trigger. There was not even a click; he had not mastered the cocking lever yet. But the sheer cold-bloodedness of the action made the skipper gasp. If the weapon had been charged and cocked, that shot must have meant the death of the chief, his bearers, and all at least in front of him. Still the old villain was undisturbed.

"He's either cold-blooded as a snake, or he believes what I told him about that gun!" muttered Saunders over his shoulder to Tod.

"Cold-blooded it is, then!" retorted Tod, sharply. "Better watch yer step, cap'n. Look there!"

A turn in the trail brought them abruptly in sight of a swaying bamboo and creeper bridge, slung across the stark abyss, running away with distance into a mere thread of natural rope and stick apparently incapable of bearing the weight of one man. Out upon it, nevertheless, the bearers stepped with their tremendous burden, and the structure squealed and crackled in gruesome resemblance to the cracking and grinding of broken bones.

At the far end, where stood that vast assembly of savages, the frail bridge was anchored to the cliff face by means of great wooden pegs driven deep into the soft strata and wedged with clumsy skill. Glancing back, the skipper turned a grim face to old Tod, for the weight of men upon it already

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made the track sag like the bottom of a water-bag.

Suddenly a sharp crack sounded, and he heard Tod gasp. He was puzzled, himself, for that crack was nothing like that he would expect the cracking of the structure to be. He met Tod's dark gaze inquiringly, shaking his head when the old mate grimly indicated the bridge roadway and side ropes.

"What else is it then?" demanded Carter.

Nuanou and his advanced men had now reached the other side, and Saunders was reaching out his hand to grip the anchoring ropes, when again that sharp crack sounded close to his ear; a whip-like crack. On the instant the side rope he had just relinlinquished parted, and the structure tipped crazily sidewise, leaving him hanging with his right hand to the rope he had a moment before, grasped on the cliff

He heard Tod curse luridly behind him, then struggled up hand over hand and turned to give assistance to those behind. It was not needed; for old Tod was as nimble as the skipper, and the black fellows swarmed up the remaining parts like monkeys, apparently heedless of the mishap and their close call.

"What did I tell yuh?" grumbled Carter, ruefully regarding a skinned wrist and barked knuckles.

"You're wrong, old chap," returned Saunders, glancing comically at the dangling bridge and the profound depths beneath.

Then he let his eyes wander seemingly aimlessly, until they settled upon a high, isolated mountain peak, thickly forested, about half a mile distant across impassable country.

"What does a high-power rifle bullet sound like as it passes close by your head, Tod?"

"Whines, don't it?"

"It does not. It snaps, just like a whip-snapper, Tod. And that sound we heard first was a bullet, —— close to my ears, too. The second crack was a bullet, and it cut the rope. Tod, old hoss, there's somebody gunning for us already, from over yonder; I don't believe anything like this happens from a shot at a venture. And who, besides Oopdyke and ourselves, would have modern high power guns up here?"

"Neuman, d'ye mean?" exclaimed Tod, seeing a light.

"That's what I mean!" rejoined Saunders.

CHAPTER XXVII

SAUNDERS IS IRRITATED

TWO days after entering the innermost haunts of old Chief Nuanou, Saunders drew Carter aside and made an announcement:

"Tod, unless something turns up before sundown I'm going to tear things wide open! There's more in this holding us here than meets the eye. The very air feels full of mischief. You've noticed, haven't you?"

"Huh!" grunted Tod with a heavy shrug of the shoulders "I never notices anything unless you tell me to. Why should I? Ain't you the doctor? Seems like as if a feller's entitled to know when his heart an' pluck's likely to be wanted to make a cannibal grill; but you don't say nothing, not you, so I waits in patience, hopin' to get a run for my alley-taw when the balloon goes up. Noticed anything? No, cap'n, I ain't."

From where they stood the mountains encircled them like the ramparts of a world apart. After the crossing of the bridge, they had traversed a winding gorge so deep as almost to smother the sunlight that filtered down, and after what had seemed to the leg-weary sailors a march of many miles, though in reality only one, they had arrived at the village of Nuanou. Not a word did the old chief say about their return, or about their business with him; first directing men to attend them, he had allocated a big, roomy stone hut to them and provided food and drink in abundance.

Saunders had accepted the unspoken decree on that first day, for he had come through many perils for no other purpose than to see that blazing throne and footstool, and to barter or fight for the possession of it, as Fate ordered. But after one night of uneasy repose, uneasy through constantly thinking of his men in the camp back yonder, and Venneker, he marched straight to the big building where Nuanou dwelt, and entered without ceremony only to find the chief absent and the coveted pieces of furniture standing in mid-floor, without an occupant.

Through the medium of Long's man he questioned every sullen savage he could find, there were hundreds of them about, and the sum total of the information gained was that Nuanou was away on most important

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business, would be away two or three days, and the strangers were to remain until his return. The village and all it contained was at their disposal, but they could not hope to leave without guides, and it would be better for them, anyhow, not to try.

"Not so sure about that!" was the skipper's remark when telling Carter of the order. "Let's take a snoop around by ourselves, and see how tight we're bottled up. I've had a good look at that blessed stool and chair, but in the dull light of the hut. Unless it's sheer Brummagem—brass and glass—the stuff is all I've heard about it, and then some. And it's unguarded!"

"Then they told ye true, skipper—we can't git out!" retorted Carter shortly.

"Let's see," Saunders said, and led the way toward the crack in the hills they had entered by, carefully avoiding any appearance of stealth, wishful to find out exactly how they were guarded.

Right across the comparatively level circle in which stood the scattered village they strode, passing among knots of men and women, followed by swarms of goggle-eyed black children who fell over stones and each other in their curiosity to get a front view of the big red-headed white man who dared to give their chief a gun which would not shoot except to kill an enemy. And no man tried to stop them.

"Queer!" the skipper muttered.

They reached and entered the gorge, the track lay plain ahead.

"Don't seem to need guides, anyhow," Tod remarked.

He peered up at the skyline as they passed through a part of the ravine where a man of good reach might touch both sides as he walked in the middle.

"Bluffin', skipper, that's what! Y' let yourself be bluffed for once, I reckon. ——!"

Tod leaped back, treading on a loose stone and coming to his knees, while Saunders halted abruptly, glared upward and ahead, then laughed quietly.

"No, don't need guides—nor yet guards, Tod!" he said. "That stone weighed a ton. But d'ye see where it fell? Come on, let's try on. Obviously they don't want to hurt us, or else they have a mighty poor idea of how a stone falls."

The boulder had fallen from the heights quite twenty yards ahead of them; but its weight had shaken the earth. As they proceeded, trying to appear unconscious of anything suspicious, another stone came roaring down the precipice, bounding from ledge to ledge as the sides drew farther apart and the slopes were less sheer.

"Shouldn't be surprized if they didn't want us to come any farther," grinned Red, turning about without further hesitation. "Remember about how the land slopes from that busted bridge, Tod?"

"I should think from there to the village is one long down-grade. Don't recall any variation much. Why? Think we might try along the top?"

"Yes, and perhaps get a sight of the Johnny who's been playing bowls at us."

They had tried along the edge of the gorge. Nobody was seen; nobody tried to stop them; but when they arrived at the greater chasm, across which that rickety bridge swung, they found that only by the ravine could the bridge be reached, unless they had ropes. They saw, too, why that road needed no watchman. The broken bridge swayed below them, inaccessible, and still broken. The farther side seemed as far off as the distant mountains whence had come those two high-power bullets.

Irritated beyond his customary self-restraint, Saunders tried threats, even though his party was but four against four hundred, and his best rifle was gone. But here also Nuanou had builded well. Scowling savages, armed with stout bows and long spears, some with steel knives too, who might have been expected to take up such a paltry challenge and clean up the hardy little band of four, only scowled more fiercely, and shrugged broad black shoulders as they turned their backs on the white men and their threats.

Nothing that he could think of fitted the case. The skipper knew that no matter whether they fought him or not, there he must still remain unless he could force them to guide him out; and when he thought of that broken bridge, apparently the sole means of exit from the stronghold of Nuanou, he threw down his hand, as it were, and resigned himself to another night in virtual captivity.

But as the sun began to slide down the western heavens on the second full day, he came to the end of his patience, and informed Tod that he meant to start something.

"Stand by, in case I want you," he said. "When the sun comes down to that big

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peak over there, have the two boys right here."

"What y' going to try?" grumbled Carter. "Goin' to have a cut at flyin' over that giddy gash in the mountains?"

"No. I'm not any more crazy than usual, old chap. Hasn't it entered that dear old skull of yours that Nuanou must have used some other way out? Well, we can't frighten these folks into giving us guides, it seems; but if we collar one of 'em alone, and treat him properly, I think he'll be amenable to reason, hey?"

"And s'pose he don't care no more for reason than the others do for threats?"

"Then we'll try without a guide, anyhow. Tod, there's old Venneker back there, Lord knows in what state, and I won't leave him any longer. If Nuanou means to hold me at his own good will and pleasure, he'll have to show me that he's stronger or more cunning than I am—and I've got Tod Carter, the old sea fox, to help me."

AS THE sun sank, one by one the *Black Pearl's* four drifted to the meeting point. The skipper approached from a new direction, and with him came willingly a frizzy-haired half-grown boy, dazzled silly apparently by the marvels of a cheap pocket shaving mirror. Without appearing to notice his comrades, Saunders turned back and walked toward the place he had just left, Tod and the others following at a distance.

Beyond the last hut the mountain wall rose sheer to three hundred feet above the surrounding ridges, and it seemed just an impassable wall. But the skipper wandered along, and slowly entered a shallow depression in the softer stratum on which the village was built. The boy took no notice of direction; he was fascinated by the sight of the beautifully hideous visage that grinned at him from the magic circle of the glass. But when the depression suddenly dropped into a decided pit, and the skipper started to slide down, calling now for Tod and the rest to follow, the youngster opened his cavernous mouth and emitted a howl that echoed far over the crags.

Tod fell upon him, clapping a huge horny hand over that appalling vocal organ, and old Long's cannibal seconded the attack in a truly savage way by cramming the lad's mouth full of earth. Swiftly they bound him with belts and knife-lanyards, rolled him out of sight from above, and crouched as far out of view themselves as the formation of the slopes permitted.

For ten minutes they cowered there, and nothing happened.

"Come on, lads, let's try further," said the skipper. "Bring the fog-horn along, or he'll ——"

"What's that?" Tod broke in, standing straight up in alarm.

From somewhere not very far distant, though the sound was muffled by the mountains, came the crackling reports of firearms, and at least a majority of the guns sounded like modern rifles. Others there were that had the louder, hollower report of real old gas-pipe guns.

"Let's go see!"

The skipper left the boy with Long's man and ran as fast as the sloping ground would let him in the direction of the reports. A hundred yards he ran, with old Tod and the seaman puffing behind; then all were brought to a staggering halt on the brink of a cañon that dwarfed even that awe-inspiring cleft where swung the broken bridge.

"Gosh!" stammered Tod.

There was no bridge here; but at a distance beneath which seemed immeasurable the country lay in gently rolling green waves which Saunders estimated to be no less than the crests of a gigantic forest. But it was immediately opposite that their interest centered; for there, in just one spot, another crest rose almost level with their own standing ground, and it was there that the guns were shooting. The flashes could be seen in the failing light of the setting sun, and now and then a yell burst forth, but none of the combatants came in sight from the shades of the jungle-clad crest.

"Down!" snapped Saunders suddenly, hauling Tod to earth.

A thudding sound in the rock beside him had been accompanied by the vicious whip-cracker snap of a bullet, and instinctively he felt that again these were not shots at a venture. With his pocket binoculars he scanned the scene of the hidden conflict, but saw nothing except now and then a flash. The reports were incessant; other spiteful messengers of no good whacked into the solid rock, but none came near enough yet to persuade him to quit trying to detect the sender.

Then Tod Carter swore roundly, and

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held up for the skipper to see a bloody finger.

"Hit?"

"Bit o' rock. Goin' to stop here until they score a hit?"

"No. Going right away, as soon as I can make out whether that's a man I see or not."

"Where?" Tod craned his neck and peered hard at the noisy bit of landscape where all seemed sound, yet which spewed forth potential death.

"There! It's a man all right," chuckled Saunders, as a long arrow flashed by and stuck quivering in the ground twelve feet from where he lay.

"Huh, them? Don't mind them so much," grunted Tod. "They don't flick yer brains out like them soft-nosed bullets do."

"No," remarked the skipper crawling over and pulling out the arrow from the earth, "perhaps not, Tod. But neither can you receive messages like this by bullet!"

He unrolled as he spoke a bit of tightly wrapped paper from the arrow shaft.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEWS FROM NEUMAN

OUT of range of any more shots, chance or otherwise, the skipper read a closely written note from Oopdyke.

You have to stay where you are until Nuanou wants you to go, so you might as well have patience and keep out of range. Your camp and men, Venneker, too, are all safe. I am looking after things out here. Neuman is here, and on British territory. He's sending those shots across that you notice; he intended meeting you on that leasehold you gouged out of him; but something has happened —I don't know yet what it is—and he's trying all he knows to stir up a mess on your side of the line which will give him an excuse to bring up a force and start on a punitive raid. Already the march of Koesch's Arab and his cannibals through the southern territory has started the Papuans growling against England. This business up here is going to make bad medicine unless we can stop it. I know old Nuanou; I have almost convinced him you are O. K., and it is because he wants you to stand by him if Neuman tries to cross into his village that he has kept you there. One fine morning you will find all your men and baggage camped outside your hut. Therefore I say, stay— *And whatever you do, don't think anything more about that throne and stool! You'll be badly fooled.*

"Huh! What's he mean?" growled Carter after a moment of puzzled thought. "Didn't the Dutchman tell yuh as the gaudy furniture was worth all report said, and then a bit more?"

"He certainly did," replied Saunders, almost as puzzled as the mate. "Maybe he thinks we can't get away with it even if we collar it. He doesn't know much about us, eh, Tod, you old ruffian? But—" the skipper snatched off his solar topi and rumpled his red hair in perplexity—"what beats me is all this ruddy mess outside there. Here I come, provided with the papers all shipshape and Bristol fashion, to take up a lease honestly come by, and to have a look at the crown jewels in passing, and a snuff-colored old rip who more than likely came right out of Petticoat Lane to rule Papuan cannibals gently coops me up without any fuss and does it well, too. D'ye see how we're to do anything, Tod?"

"I see how we're goin' to do what we're bloomin' well told, all right," grinned Carter, for once able to catch his infallible skipper in a real failure. "We're a-goin' to stop in that stinkin' village, a-listenin' to the merry sound of a honest-to-Simon scrap as we got to stay out of. Unless—" he added with a violent contortion of his grim old face that Saunders recognized as his best attempt at a real laugh—"unless you want to try that spider bridge back yonder."

"Too many loose boulders on that cliff," rejoined Saunders more cheerfully. "Come on, old hoss. Getting dark. No use to lose our supper just because we're caught aback for a spell. See anything of our noisy guide?"

It was quite dark when they reached their hut and turned the boy loose with his magic mirror. Fires blazed in the middle square, and the smell of broiling meat and bubbling stews filled the evening with fragrance highly appreciated by hungry men. Saunders and Carter paced back and forth, smoking, waiting for their supper. It was long in coming, and they ventured nearer to the fires.

There they found most of the adult male population, gripping clubs and howling frantically and ferociously at a group of kneeling women, who took no notice of scowls or threats, but seemed intent upon something in their midst, something on which the firelight shone, something which drew from each sooty feminine breast sobs and gasps of wondering delight.

"There's domestic discord in Nuanou's domain," laughed the skipper, walking

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across the square. "Let's see what's stopping our grub, Tod."

A shrill squeal pealed up from the midst of that kneeling, gasping huddle of women, and savage men raised murderous clubs over bowed, frizzy heads.

"Great Cæsar! They're roastin' some kid!" snapped Carter, stumbling forward, tugging at his pistol.

"Go easy!" cautioned Saunders, restraining his headstrong mate. "Don't butt in on any religious stuff. Maybe it's a sacrifice—killing a goat or something."

"——! That ain't no goat's yell. That's the howl of a human bein' gettin' done brown!" growled Carter.

Suddenly the simmering rage of the threatening savages boiled over. The menacing voices rose to a shriek, and the foremost savage, a grizzled old warrior whose neck was festooned with a heavy necklace of that most treasured of all treasures, the tusks of the wild boar, taken when they had grown into complete and perfect circles, leaped forward and brought his club down with a sounding whack on the woolly head of a fat old black woman who was one of the most gasping, sobbing of all the strangely acting women.

It was the most usual act in the world of Papua. Every wife is bought and held as a slave, to work, to be beaten, and to bear children in her spare moments; and the New Woman had not at that time spread her doctrine of sex equality as far abroad as Papua.

"Huh! It's only a family scrap!" grunted Carter, slowing up perceptibly.

He spoke as if disgusted with life.

"Yes, but look!" retorted the skipper, his eyes glistening. "Talk about your domestic revolutions! My word!"

The old savage lifted his club again, and other clubs were raised. But there was no frantic scattering of delinquent women, no hurried and subdued obedience to the loud demands for food. The fat old woman stumbled to her feet, rubbing her frizzy head, and wearing a ferocious scowl of rebellion. Her lord stepped toward her, his arm quivering, his wide-gapped mouth slobbering with rage; she uttered a piercing squeal, seized a calabash and dipped it into a pot of stew, and flung a scalding shower of gravy in the old chap's astonished face.

Swift to take the cue, every woman who could reach the pots seized a calabash, and dipped it. There was a moment of amazed hush, then the scalded savage broke into terrific lamentations, his club was flung far from him, and he plunged away dabbing at his smarting face with his hands. Reluctantly the men followed him, casting glances of bewilderment backward at the women, who again clustered about the fire, while the squealing boy resumed his suspended solo.

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Saunders, stepping forward quickly with his hand on Carter's sleeve. "What d'ye think of that?"

His big frame vibrated with mirth; even grim old Tod Carter was forced to cackle. In the very center of the terrifically hot circle, almost scorched by the fire, grovelled their recent guide, the lad whom Saunders had seduced from his duty with the gift of a mirror. With futile grabs he reached out for something; every grab was knocked aside by eager feminine fists.

Every woman leaned forward, with outstretched fingers, glistening of eye and panting of bosom, waiting to take a turn to look into that little magic circle of glass which showed them the great reason why they should no longer submit to beatings and hard labor, showed each feminine heart, in short, how immensely more beautiful its fair owner was than the ugly male thing who owned her body and claimed her soul. And their only light was from the fires, which, neglected, began to burn lower.

Meat was burned to cinders, and stew ceased to bubble; still those dusky Venuses peered into the magic circle and chattered volubly, each, like women of lighter hue, secretly comparing her own charms with those of the rest, to the great disadvantage of the rest.

"Come along; let's get our own supper," the skipper suggested with a grin. "No use waiting for service now. Nuanou's women have emancipated themselves. Tell our boys to take the dishes to the fires and get some of that stew out of the big pot. That smells like kangaroo, anyhow, whatever it is."

ALONG through the night sound could be heard of husbands and wives in harsh wordy conflict. Men served themselves as well as they could with such food as was not utterly spoiled, while the women at last fed the fires, not with any remorse for their culinary shortcomings, but

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to provide a continuation of light for their beauty worship.

The occupants of Saunders' hut slept in time, for all the noise, and none could tell in the morning at what hour the racket had subsided. Subsided it had, nevertheless, for the dawn filtered through the cane-matted doorway, soft and fragrant, a silent, windless, pearly dawn having just a promise of breeze in the west. And on first looking out, going to his morning bath under the lip of a black overhanging rock which dribbled a sparkling rivulet of cool water, the skipper was aware that some indefinable change had taken place during the night. What it was he couldn't name, but the atmosphere of the village felt different.

He peeped in several doorways, and saw the occupants, male and female, apparently deep in peaceful slumber, as if all differences of the previous evening had been amicably disposed of. He passed the boy, to whom he had given that bit of glass that had caused so great an upheaval in Papuan domestic life, sprawled on the ground in uneasy sleep, looking as if he had passed through some awful physical turmoil. Marks of fingers plentifully covered his face; little kinks of frizzy black hair hung loosely about his head, held there only through the ineradicable spring in the wire-like curls.

"Poor kid!" chuckled the skipper as he went on to his cold bath. "'E learned about wimmen from them!"

On returning, he passed close by Nuanou's big hut, and was about to take a peep inside, though he believed it to be empty. He was halted beside the door on hearing a queer, muffled sort of sound, not like anything he could place clearly—a sound as of many hands or feet scuffling weakly in dry earth; or like many gagged mouths, or tongueless mouths, striving to utter audible sounds. He stepped quietly inside, caught a glimpse of something in a vivid shaft of light that came in through the roof eaves, something other than the silent, massive throne, or the lowly, barbaric stool, and stepped outside hurriedly with a gasp.

Nuanou had come back. He slept soundly in his great chair, snoring lustily. And all around him lay warriors, armed and dusty, many scarred and bruised, snoring in more or less harmony with him. But what had taken the skipper inside, and had sent him out, gasping, only to break into a broad grin as he understood it all, was the sight of a bundle, a living bundle of women, trussed up with knees at breast and arms doubled up, six of them bundled up together in one perspiring, panting, suffocating mass, with the fat old coquette who had started the domestic revolt the bottom one of all.

Over them, as guard, crouched the grizzled old savage whom she had scalded.

"The revolution is over, and old Nuanou wears the spoils!" Saunders announced to Carter, brushing his red mop briskly while a subdued black woman brought in their plantains and breadfruit for breakfast.

"Spoils?" grunted Tod.

"Yes. He's wearing my shaving mirror around his neck."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE UNGUARDED THRONE

HOW Nuanou and his band had returned so quietly puzzled the skipper. He believed there must be an exit from the hidden village, and therefore an entrance to it, somewhere about the spot where he had watched the gun flashes and had received Oopdyke's arrow messenger. But search had failed to reveal it. As for the bridge, that, of course, might have been hastily repaired; but even such an expedient would not account for the the old chief's departure, which was taken undoubtedly while the bridge was yet broken. Also, in spite of Oopdyke's not very lucid letter, Saunders was chafing hard under the unaccustomed restraint on his actions. He welcomed the appearance of Nuanou in the doorway of his hut soon after breakfast.

"You are sailors," the chief said without preamble. "Come and make new my bridge."

He turned away as abruptly as he had come, and the skipper followed him, taking Tod Carter and the seaman. A swift inspiration had suggested leaving Long's man behind, if it could be done, with orders to look well about him while the place was vacated. Nuanou gave no sign that he noticed they were a man short, but led the way, walking as briskly as a youngster, with the skipper's party next to him and his guards, with the entire male population marching in close order behind.

"Proves the bridge is the only way, don't it?" muttered Tod.

"Why, because all hands are leaving the village?"

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"And that gaudy chair and stool."

"It proves, in my mind," remarked Saunders, "that there is another way, and a way so safe that it needs no guards."

When the column reached the point in the ravine where the walls almost came together, it was necessary that they lengthen the line to pass single file. Then something else was seen that had been missed in the denser formation of march. Close up with the leaders staggered six stout, brawny savages, bearing on their shoulders two long poles like those which carried the chief's chair of state; but these poles bore a different burden, a living, squirming burden, a burden of women, bundled up like trussed fowls, lashed together in one sweating, wheezing package.

"Hullo! Better watch this!" whispered Saunders in Tod's ear, watching the old chief just ahead keenly. "Looks like some cannibal funniness."

Nuanou half turned around as if he had heard, but gave no sign, and presently led the way out through the cleft in the mountain where the bridge end was anchored. The party filed out and stood around the pegs and wedges, looking expectantly at the chief. Nuanou waited until the bearers of the live burden stood on the brink, then uttered one sharp command in the tongue that had puzzled Long's savage before, and the bearers began slowly to swing the poles.

"Godfrey!" snapped the skipper, and stepped before Nuanou.

The old chief regarded him with a scowl, and told him to stand away.

"Stop that!" growled Saunders, seizing the old rascal's arm.

Nuanou snatched his sleeve away, leaving a piece of purple stuff in the skipper's hand, and glared menacingly.

"Stand by, Tod!" ordered Red, and the mate and the seaman took up places near the end of the poles, braving murderous looks as they did so. "See here, Nuanou," proceeded Saunders, "that sort of stuff won't do! Tell 'em to drop those women and untie them, or I won't help you fight Neuman!"

Nuanou shot a keen look at the big sailor, and a sneer wreathed his thin lips.

"No matter," he said, and again uttered that sharp command which increased the swing of the pole bearers. Not even six such savage strong men as they could hurl the weight of six well fed women, with the weight of those tremendous poles clear of their feet without attaining the momentum of a long swing.

"I'll show you how to work my gun," persisted Red, watching the swing of the poles.

"No matter."

The bearers grunted, the poles swung far back; the next swing would do. Saunders saw everything. With the speed of a fast wrestler he smothered Nuanou in his powerful embrace, lifted him bodily from his feet, and stepped to the brink of the chasm with him. Nuanou's guards stood back in terror at his predicament.

"Stop that swing, Tod!" he yelled. "Now, old fellow," he told the chief, squirming furiously in his arms, "tell 'em to let those women loose, or over you go!"

Only the decisive action of Tod Carter saved the human sacrifice from paying the penalty of their revolt, for Nuanou proved stubborn, even with his own life at stake. Not until Saunders stood with him suspended fairly over the edge, and actually loosened some of his fingers, did the old savage squeal the order that set the bearers to work cutting bonds. Carter and the seaman could not stop the bearers, but they did manage to break the rhythm of the swing, and thus cause a delay which rendered Nuanou's belated decision useful.

The liberated suffragettes staggered for a moment on cramped limbs, then scuttled off through the gorge as if the —— were after them, never once looking back.

"For that you will pay," Nuanou said simply, gazing up at Saunders in mild wonder.

"Talk of payment when you're able to collect," grinned the skipper, pleasantly. "Now what d'ye want done to your bridge? Got any rope?"

"Grass ropes. You are a sailor, you can make ropes."

The chief called to the bearers of the pole, now at liberty for other work, and gave them an order. They in turn selected others until some fifty men stood apart from the rest; some small and wiry like apes, some deep of chest and huge of limbs.

"Here are men. You with your own sailors shall be the heads, these, my people, shall be arms and legs for you. Tonight we shall use the bridge."

Nuanou gave his orders as if there could be no possible doubt about the job being done; and without waiting another moment,

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led the remainder of his men back through the gorge to the village.

"——! It reminds me o' the hoary old joke about the examination of the bosun's mate!" growled Carter, glaring at the surroundings absolutely barren of vegetation, vineless and devoid of everything in the nature of fiber. "Remember it? Old shellback tryin' to pass for bosun before a rorty old board o' moss-grown retired Navy Hadmirals. They asked 'im how he'd go about riggin' a ship wot had no spars left, and no riggin', no nothing. New spars come alongside in the water; get 'em aboard: 'Come now, 'ow 'd ye do it, me man?' they says.

" 'If I wuz bosun?' inquires the old tar, twistin' 'is forelock. 'Yes, me man,' sez they. 'I'd go below an' let th' bloomin' bosun's mate do it!' sez the old shellback."

"What's to prevent us getting over and away?" mused Saunders, unmindful of old Tod's labored bit of humor.

Tod scowled in chagrin, for it was not often he permitted himself to lapse into light speech. But his scowl was a cherubic smile compared to that on the face of one of the bearers, who, at the skipper's words, stepped over to the remaining bridge anchor rope, laid the blade of an ax upon it, and made an expressive gesture toward the pit.

"Ho, that's to prevent us, hey?"

Saunders accepted the situation as inevitable. For once in a long career he found himself undecided, or unable to decide quickly. There were so many sides to his business now: Venneker, Neuman, and the stool of Nuanou chief among them; and he was virtually a prisoner, although the Dutchman, whose opinions he had learned to respect, assured him that he and all his men were safe. In any case, until that other exit was found, nothing could be done while the bridge remained unrepaired. He looked long and fixedly at a dense patch of bluish green in the forest on the cliff top opposite.

"That looks like good rope stuff," he said. "Here, Ugly, put down that chopper and take a gang over to cut me a dozen manloads of that creeper."

The scowling savage with the ax sullenly obeyed, and half the party detailed to help the bridge makers trotted down to the brink, swung off on the sound rope by hands and feet like monkeys, and one by one made the perilous passage. It was a gymnastic feat of high order, a feat impossible of execution by any other means, for the bridge was impassable on foot, or even by crawling on the floor itself, at least until mid-bridge; and only men unencumbered by weights of any kind could pass as the savages passed.

Saunders had said "cut," but the creeper he indicated was of a nature that allowed huge masses of it to be pulled, and the collectors carried no tools except their sinewy hands. While he waited, he tentatively put part of his weight on the swaying anchor rope, and drew back with a dubious grin. Tod tried it, as did the seaman, but neither of them, able and bodily fit as they all were, could consider facing that passage without a shiver.

They noticed, too, that while the big leader obeyed the order so far as telling off a gang was concerned, he did not go himself, but picked out those of his men who were slim and small, the ape-like men. He wondered how they were to return, laden with huge masses of creeper. Their solution of the problem was simple and effective, so much so, that he again wondered what he could teach them.

IT WAS noon when the first man swung back across the chasm, and he bore no burden; but in his strong teeth he clenched the end of a single creeper twenty yards long, stripped of all superfluous shoots and leaves; it trailed after him, slithering along the broken bridge like a thin snake, and others were tied to it, so that when he landed at the skipper's feet he placed at hand a single rope by which all the rest were hauled over. Then came the gatherers, and in an hour more all hands were busily plaiting sennett of creeper under the seamanly tuition of Tod Carter.

Before the sun lipped the distant hills, the bridge was repaired, and Saunders stepped out on it to test it. Strong plait had taken the place of broken single strands, and the floor was woven to mat-like density. The structure was strong enough to bear the passage of many men at once, and the skipper turned back, only to notice with a little start that the big savage had again taken up his ax, and was standing with the blade upon the rope.

"All right, my ugly friend," he smiled, "you needn't cut it. Back we go. I'll talk to your venerable chief about it."

The savage understood but little of the short speech, but he understood his duty,

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and briefly motioned Saunders and his companions to lead the way.

Back at the village a surprize awaited them. The first thing that struck their eyes on emerging from the gorge was a fresh camp pitched in the middle of the village; the next thing was Jacky, grinning widely; after him Horatius stepped into view, and then Venneker came toward them, pale and thin, but walking straight and erect, wearing a wan smile, with hand outstretched in greeting.

"Hullo, Saunders," he said. "We're here."

He caught the question in the skipper's eye and added with a grimace:

"Don't ask me how, or by what road. I can't tell you. Oopdyke knows, perhaps. He's inside the big hut with Nuanou. They're waiting for you. Go in," he whispered, tensely. "Talk afterwards. Something big cooking!"

The Dutchman greeted him with a nod, and immediately the chief took up the thread of the talk broken by the skipper's entry. The interior of the hut was growing dark, but it was easy enough to see that nobody besides Nuanou, Oopdyke, and the skipper was there, and yet the place seemed to hum with life. Certainly that chair could give forth no sound, even by trickery, for, massive though it was, there was no part of it which by any conceivable means might conceal any living thing capable of making such a distinctly human sound.

He had time to ponder, for the others chattered together, taking no notice of him, until he began to chafe. Not often had Red Saunders found himself in the position of playing second fiddle to any man, and now he seemed to be playing a weak third. Tired of it, he started to go out.

"Dond't run avay, cap'n," said Oopdyke in grave tones. "In von minute jou hear somet'ing. Der crisis iss here."

Lighting a cheroot, the last of his pocket store, feeling entitled to use it now that his camp gear was at hand, Saunders paced to and fro in the gloomy hut, filling the air with pungent tobacco smoke that rapidly calmed his impatience. Always he could hear that insistent humming, as if a host of people were murmuring in unison far away on a still night.

He could distinguish nothing in the hut that led to the supposition of secret exits, nor had he seen anything of the kind on previous examinations. The hut was never entirely light except in spots as the sun shone through roof vents. While he puzzled over it, however, the discussion was ended, and Oopdyke took his arm and led the way over to the new camp.

"Eferything iss ready," the Dutchman said as they entered his own tent.

Venneker hovered near-by, as if anxious to hear or speak, but Oopdyke appeared to avoid meeting his eye.

"Since jou appeared so suddenly in dot gully, und I shot a message to jou mit der arrow, many things happened, mine friendt. Jou almost found der secret passage ouf Nuanou den, old boy, but nod quite. Dot's a goot chob, for jou had been det by now. But listen: Who do jou suppose has fell foul ouf dot Neuman feller?"

"No good at guessing," returned Saunders wearily. "For the love of Old Windy get down to cases!"

"Vell," chuckled Oopdyke, "jou'd nefer guess, anyhow. I told jou Neuman vould use jou as a catspaw in his schemes to steal der rich bit ouf territory he's found gold upon. Mine own business is to see dot he don't bodder mit Holland's property. He counted on old Nuanou helping him, and togedder they meant to sweep through this country and massacre and burn until nobody was left, und nobody would dare venture into der beastly country except mit an army. Long before dot happened he would hafe collared der schwag, stolen old Nuanou's treasures—" Oopdyke paused to chuckle heavily—"und left der three governments to pick der bones ouf contention. But somebody has passed der vord dot Ret Saunders is a magic vorker, und Nuanou heard it. He toldt me he tried to shoot jou, und jou didn't mofe, but der plessed gun wouldn't shoot jou. He pelieves most ouf dose stories ouf magic now, and alretty he was wavering towards our side. Den, oop from der plessed wilderness comes der Babe in der Vood mit his party, py Golly!"

"What! Baldwin?" grinned Saunders, entirely recovering his good temper.

"Dot's der cheese. *Ja*, und der government party mit him. All dose tales dey haf heard apoudt der murderings und burnings dot Arab done in deir territory, und dey know, from advices apoudt der murder ouf Koesch, dot der Arab iss, or vos, in Sherman service engaged. So here dey are, near by, und tonight iss der big night. Ve all tumble in on der Neuman party und make it a clean up!"

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Saunders felt a wave of elation surge through him in the prospect of real action. Within sight of his leasehold, in actual touch of the gaudy treasure he had come to investigate, the hour was about to strike. Then his face darkened, and he swore fervidly.

"Venneker!"

"*Ja,* I know," said Oopdyke, gently. "Venneker stops here, mit der vimmen. Leave a couple ouf guards mit him, but don't let him see it's to watch ofer him, only for company und service. He isn't fit, but somet'ing is making him chuck a stout chest; I think he wants to get into der mess to square himself for past misdoings. Anyvay, don't be afraid for him. If der vorst comes, der Paldvin chap ain't got a warrant for Venneker, but only for a certain Ret Saunders, und he knows now dot jou aind't der man he should carry back."

"When do we start?"

"In an hour. Eat well, und see to jour arms. I haf a new rifle for jou, to replace dot vun stole by Nuanou, der old thief!"

In an hour Oopdyke led Saunders and all his men, except the two remaining with Venneker, down to the repaired bridge and over into the dense forest beyond. Saunders resisted Venneker's pleading with an effort, for the man seemed painfully anxious to do something to atone for the past. He was too weak for night marching in such country, with the certainty of a hard fight ahead, and had to obey orders.

"But where's Nuanou and all his tribe?" asked the skipper, tallying heads as they filed across the open.

"He goes by der odder vay. Efery man except Venneker und your two men is now afoot. Only vimmen stay behind, und efen dey vill come ven called on. Dis is der big business, Ret!"

"Only women left, with three of my chaps? Has Nuanou taken his chair and stool then?"

"I toldt jou not to bodder about dem. Dey dond't need no guarding," replied Oopdyke, shortly.

CHAPTER XXX

WAR!

THAT Oopdyke had not exaggerated the gravity of the business in hand was speedily evident. A first-quarter moon sufficed to light the party well into the fastnesses of a chaos of tumbled mountains, thickly matted with jungle, beyond which might be seen at intervals of the winding trackless course a high, pillar-like mass of rock which Oopdyke said was in reality a colossal mountain several miles away—their destination, or objective.

"It is on the odder side ouf dot peak jour leasehold is. On this side is dot gold strike ouf Neuman's. Leedle way over dere is mine country's poundaries. So! Neuman crossed oldt Nuanou's land dot time der fighting was, und got to dot peak before we could stop him. Soon he shall find dot it takes more than vun to make a proper war. Der moon goes oudt, now. Poof! Like dot. We sleep a leedle, den in dawn light forward again."

"H'm!" Saunders grunted. "Boundaries are no concern of mine. My business lies in my own property, with Neuman personally."

"*Ja,* und mit Nuanou's sparklers! Peliefe me, Ret, none ouf dem things can jou touch, sparklers or jour rightful land, until Neuman is wiped oudt or beaten. Und jou can't reach dot bit ouf land, neither, except by this way. Anyway, Neuman never meant to let jou take up dot lease. He depended on Nuanou to stop jou, but I fixed dot."

The big Dutchman shook with a heavy chuckle.

"So it seems. How?"

"Nefer mind how. But so I did, und because ouf your skill as a surgeon, Ret. The thing is, dot Nuanou surprized Neuman mit attack instead ouf cooperation, und now der Sherman und his associates are fixed in dot mountain like in a castle, und all der cannibals mit dem is swarming in dese woods among. Soon as day breaks, dot oldt scoundrel Long shall take vun direction, Nuanou is alretty taking anoder course, und me und jou shall mit our boys make straight for der peak. But—" Oopdyke lowered his voice so that only Tod Carter heard besides the skipper—"dis is not der white man's affair, rightly. Neuman und his white pals aind't showing demsellufs openly. Only savages is fighting, in case ouf inquiry; only it happens dot he has taken up a position on foreign territory, ouf jour country, Saunders, so jou can go to him—if jou aind't stopped before jou gets there."

"And that government party?"

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"Is now marching here at der double, mit dot qvickest ouf all civilizers, a machine gun oudt ouf der boat! Sleep now; dis is war!"

A long time before the dawn war burst upon them without further warning. The sentries started to awake their leaders, and simultaneously Tod Carter, Saunders, and Oopdyke awoke, without being touched, to sniff suspiciously.

"Fire!" decided the skipper, and leaped to his feet with a yell that speedily aroused the camp.

"Forest fire, *ja!*" grunted Oopdyke, peering into the heavy darkness, trying with sight and smell to locate the blaze.

There seemed no break in the mantle of night, nothing unusual except that pungent reek of burning forest débris, squarely to windward.

"Scatter, boys, and find the end of the blaze," the skipper ordered, himself plunging directly into the thickest of the reek with old Tod Carter close at his heels.

Merely by going directly into the wind it was simple to arrive at the fire; it was not so simple a matter to discover its extent, for it seemed to sweep in a wide arc with no limits short of the unscalable mountains. But the center of it was a wide expanse of what had been glade; grassy weeds and short brush, which crackled and sent up volleys of sparks, and only lessened in ferocity where it had already begun to take hold of the greater timber of the forest.

"When that catches, we might as well be in an oven!" said the skipper.

Oopdyke was beating at the flames with a broad palmetto bough, seeking to try the width of the belt of flame.

"Haf to preak through," he remarked. "Seems like dot stuff can't be very wide. Shall ve try it?"

"Tod! Muster all hands!" Saunders answered. "Call in the stragglers. If we make a flying column of it, most of the rear lads will get through, anyhow. May as well take all the gear we can pack. If we have to chuck it away it'll help kill the fire. Ready?"

Men ran in from the sides and formed in a solid body behind the three white men. Long and his cannibals looked scared to death, yet fell into place obediently, obviously buoyed up by the trust they had in the skipper and his white magic. As for his own lads from the schooner, they would gladly have followed him into Hades to hunt snow-balls if he so ordered.

"All set!" growled Carter.

"Then rush it!"

Like a gigantic block of living shadow they charged, entered the fire fringe in a smothering stench of singeing hair and scorched flesh, and were met in full career by a deadly flight of stone-tipped arrows from beyond the blazing barrier.

It was Oopdyke who first fell back. With his big red face doubly red, and looking grotesque under a fringe of smoking hair, he cursed gutturally when a tribesman of old Long's pitched sidewise, transfixed with an arrow, and hit him behind the knees, almost felling him into the fire.

"Back!" he yelled. "Back, Ret! Dis is useless. I haf an idea!"

The fire appeared endless in breadth and depth; the skipper could see nothing less than a terrific loss in men by plunging blindly on, and yelled the command to retire. More arrows followed them, and now a few bullets flew with the feathered shafts.

"Dot's no fool pehind dot attack!" growled Oopdyke, mopping his scorched face tenderly.

"Can't we pull the old prairie fire dodge?" suggested the skipper, furious at the sight of a half score of his good lads cringing under the torture of mutual extraction of arrows, with the torment of burns added. "I don't know a lot about this land fire business, but I've heard——"

"*Ja*, on der prairie it is proper to start anudder fire, den hop ofer der burned patch und follow oop der new fire until der party is safe from der first big blaze by having a wide belt ouf burned ground pehind dem. But this is different. Dem swines ofer dere started der fire right on der edge ouf der grass. It would take us a day to start a fire in der jungle dot would make any headway. If we drop back to der ravine——"

"Not for us!" the skipper retorted. "Didn't you see my lads, shot through and half baked? Here, Tod, get busy with Long and his crew. Cut down all the wettest, rottenest underbrush you can get quickly. Oopdyke, you gather my boys, and stretch 'em out in a line well back from the fire. As soon as the next flight of arrows comes over, let drive with your rifles into the thick of the fire, and keep on shooting.

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IT WAS necessary to take Long and his savages well clear of the fierce blaze for a while, for they had expected to pass through the flames unscorched by following the big red-headed skipper, and their smarting hides were a painful disappointment to them. Cutting rank undergrowth, rotting ferns, oozing, stinking weeds with leaves as broad as a Turkish towel, suited the naked warriors much better than facing those roaring flames, and there was something about the operation which savored to their minds of mystery.

Meanwhile the rifles had started a fusilade, and yells from across the fire told of wild shots that went home. A heap of greenery as high as a haystack stood well back from the line of fire, which had already begun to lick at the trunks of great trees and was sending up clouds of reeking steam as it played about the lush grasses and wet moss at the forest giants' roots.

"Now get a move on!" snapped the skipper, his keen eye upon every part of the operation. "Oopdyke, and you, Tod, wrap all hands in that green stuff, with plenty about their feet. Hurry up!"

As he covered his own body with a sheaf of leaves until he resembled a shock of underdone corn, he heard voices, far away, on the far side of the fire, and there were white men's voices among them. Words he could not distinguish, but the tenor of them could be guessed, for a half dozen high-power bullets whanged through the smoke instead of stone-tipped arrows.

Oopdyke dropped a bundle of broad leaves with a grunt, watching his solar topi fly up from his head and land six yards behind him. Then he phlegmatically resumed his job, and picked up his perforated helmet when finished.

"Ready!" he announced, Tod Carter putting the last touches on his own green armor.

Old Long and his cannibals were grinning now, for they too were arrayed as beautifully as any queens of May, and fully expected the skipper to wave his hands over them and send them flying through the air, far above the scorch of the fire, to descend like great green beetles upon their enemies.

"Spread the guns along the line!" was the order. "Full magazines, and fire from the hip as long as there's a shot left. Long, you old fairy! Tell your ruffians to howl, and keep on howling. Come on!"

As he snapped the final command, Red leaped into the fire, his automatic pistol spitting like a machine gun. As one man the line bounded at his heels, guns cracking, savages yelling; and the fire licked impotently at their green armor until, so suddenly that they emerged still yelling, they pitched headlong through the smoke and fell in full career upon a dancing, painted mob of red-eyed cannibals who were also yelling and shooting arrows into the fire, but whose yells were hushed at the apparition of half a hundred howling bundles of green stuff possessed of ——s who outyelled and outshot them.

"Dot's der cheese!" roared Oopdyke, tearing aside the blinding leaves from his face and beginning to sight his rifle with care. "Vun goot volley, und, pouf!"

One good volley more than sufficed, for, as it crashed out, old Long tugged his arms free of his grass wrappings, his men did the same, and he led them in a mad, headlong onslaught that routed the painted men and sent them hurtling up the slopes of the foothills of that frowning mountain beyond.

CHAPTER XXXI

NEUMAN'S TRUE COLORS

TWICE while counting noses and appraising casualties was the skipper forced to shift the temporary camp he had pitched after routing the enemy. The first time was on account of water. Water was badly wanted by gasping, scorched, half-suffocated men, wounded or whole; and every canteen was full of water too warm to be refreshing. A search in the lessening darkness, a darkness that lessened both with the departing of night and the gathering of fiery brilliancy, was partly successful, for water was found, trickling muddily down from the still nebulous heights.

A second move was forced upon them by a steady, devilishly precise, rhythmic dropping of bullets into the camp.

"*Whit!*" they came, and a man stumbled to his knees while drinking. "Fill your canteens, lads!" snapped the skipper. "Hurry up!"

"*Whang!*" they came, and a man's canteen flew from his eager grasp like a watery Catherine-wheel.

Wounded men were neglected perforce, until every water container had been

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emptied of tepid water and refilled at the cool trickling stream; and the bullets dropped sheer down the mountainside fair in the course of the trickle.

"Easy to see who's conducting this campaign from the other side," grinned Saunders. "It's dirty warfare, whatever the motive."

"*Ja*, und it gets dirtier presently, maybe," rejoined Oopdyke.

The big Dutchman was crouched under a ledge of rock, sheltered from the hail of lead, and intently scanning the distant, sharpening sky-line as the dawn tipped the peaks with pink.

Suddenly the day broke in vivid silver light, and Oopdyke uttered a grunt.

"Neuman iss too late!" he said. "Look, und see der infernal cunning ouf der man, und how goes it astray."

Creeping down the distant peak abreast of that under which they crouched, a seemingly interminable line of ants poured from summit to connecting ridge.

"Dot's Nuanou!" chuckled Oopdyke, and gripped the skipper's arm fiercely as that impatient mariner started to his feet at the sound of a terrific peal of rage and fear that burst out in the forest-clad slopes above him.

"Vait! Dot's Neuman's big card, und it's lost der pot!"

For a while it was impossible to distinguish any difference in the separate cries of that uproar. The only certainty seemed to be that from the very summit itself arose a sharp shout as of suddenly realized chagrin, while that long line of ant-like creepers beyond crept ever nearer the ridge leading to the nearer crest without sound, without seeming end.

But soon the louder cries became distinguishable, and as soon as they could be divided into the anguished howls of many fleeing people, mingled with the fiendish yells of following butchers, the people themselves were seen, leaping like frightened deer from crag to crag, men, women, children, fleeing before the death that dogged their heels, only to be met and turned by more death in front, and again from side to side.

"What in thunder is it all for?" rasped the skipper, peering up for a sight of any white man behind all the confusion.

"Jour benefit," chuckled Oopdyke, sighting his own rifle for a turn in the cliffside at which every one of those flying and pursuing figures must sooner or later appear. "Vait!"

"Wait!" growled old Tod Carter, cuddling the stock of his gun against his cheek. "Allus wait! Say, skipper, y' ain't let somebody lead yuh by the nose this trip, have yuh? Be dummed if I ever see yuh so precious willin' to take orders as yuh be now."

"Patience," smiled the big Hollander. "Der schkipper is right in vaiting, Carter oldt friendt. Not far could jou haf got alone in dis country, for all der schkipper's——"

"Look there!" snapped the skipper, clapping his glasses to his eyes and pointing with his free hand at the ridge across which Nuanou's men were now vanishing.

"That's a white man! Is it Neuman? What's he doing on that side?"

The Dutchman gazed long and intently, shaking his head; but it was old Tod Carter, without glasses, who grunted first—

"If that ain't Venneker I'll eat my gun rag!"

"Going ofer to Neuman's side!" gurgled Oopdyke, his red face clouding.

"You wait now!" Saunders snapped in his turn. "Venneker's been all kinds of a blessed lunatic, and worse, but he's not that kind of a cur. Look up yonder!"

As the skipper made out the lay of the land, that ridge across which those seeming ants had crawled, and across which the white man thought to be Venneker was now creeping with every appearance of extreme caution, began at a point immediately to the side of the spot at which Oopdyke's arrow message had reached him. Try as he would, using every angle of light with his glasses, he could distinguish no opening in a sheer mountain face; and yet it was clear that not only had Nuanou led his own men out by that avenue, but Venneker had discovered and used it too.

Between his men and the eastern spur of the mountain lay the devastated forest with the smoke rolling in clouds above its waving crests. And what had appeared to be a single, monolithic summit when first viewed from a distance, now lay unmistakably revealed as a pair of peaks, connected by that halfway ridge, dropping sheer on one side of each part to a sloping, rolling foot-hill country mantled with virgin jungle and thorn thicket.

It was from a point midway of the

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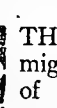
height above the trickling spring that those flying figures had first come to view; from a point just above that had come the dropping shots that were intended to guard the spring from this last point, the objective of the skipper's vision, and the subject of his exclamation, burst a body of armed men, yelling in a fashion far out of keeping with their appearance.

"British colonials!" exclaimed old Tod Carter, dropping his rifle butt from his shoulder in disgust.



THE others paused. Well they might; for the down-sweeping body of white-clad riflemen, glittering with brass buttons and naked bayonets, wearing the peculiar sun-helmet of British colonial troops, possessed shoes, to be seen even at the distance, and their faces were white, their hands were white, and they yelled "Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!" as they pelted pell-mell down the slopes, driving before them the shivering wretches that were already leaping at top speed from crag to crag to escape the dusky foes in front.

"British colonials ——!" grunted Saunders, and his gun spat lead as he said it. "Shoot! Shoot like a blooming firecracker! There's no white man that's a friend o' mine will do that, by Godfrey!"

"That" was the crux of the whole matter. Those white, white-clad, white-man-armed men pelting down the slopes headlong in a manner far removed from what might be expected of men wearing boots, never accustomed to boots or boot-broken, whichever might be the case, were shooting into the rear of that other body of people, men, women, children, fleeing before them, and the "Hooray-ing" rose to a shriek as they fired.

"Y're right, cap'n!" growled Carter, sighting again and firing before he could be stopped. "F'r once y've took y'r proper place in this game. P'hloo! Y' bleedin' murderer!" he yelled as his old rifle spat and sent a helmeted white-faced pursuer headlong to his certain end.

"Is that Neuman's game?" gasped Saunders.

All his hectic career had never brought him face to face with such a piece of sheer crooked fiendishness as this. Old Tod Carter seized on the one keynote of the whole business when he fired that shot, and even Oopdyke, though knowing the truth, or guessing shrewdly at it, waited to be sure, since he was on foreign territory, before taking the responsibility the mate accepted without a tremor. For Tod, as for the skipper, it was sufficient to know that somebody was posing in the uniform of a race not noted for foul play to pull off a trick of murder which no race but one could do in white face and white attire.

"*Ja!*" grunted Oopdyke.

The report of his rifle was as punctuation to his grunt, and another helmeted figure pitched forward down the slope. "Jou haf more softness of heart dan I haf, Saunders, or I vouldt haf toldt jou perfore. Tam jou, nopoty knows vere jour heart is, jou oldt schemer! Fire avay! Fire avay like plazes, because dot's der trick Neuman plays to vork murder here und get der flag ouf jour country in a —— bad mess! Shoot, tam jou, Carter, und den vatch for der moment to sharge!"

Shoot they did. Shot and shot again. And the pursuing army seemed to stop in mid-career and wait for orders. Then a halt came, a halt so sudden as to prove the trickery of it before it was well realized.

Long and his savages had just appeared among the dense undergrowth beneath the point toward which the fugitives were making; the *Black Pearl's* men had more than begun to show their marksmanship; the slopes were dotted with white-clad, helmeted figures, and one, in falling, had flung out his rifle clear of the earth and sent it unconsciously hurtling down to Saunders' feet; the forest and mountains resounded with the clamor of frenzied savages fleeing vainly from unmerited and unlooked-for annihilation, when out from a crag immediately above the trickling spring stepped a tall white man bearing a white rag on a cleaning rod.

"Neuman!" uttered the skipper, and leaped to his feet intent only upon meeting the man face to face.

"Dond't ignore der white flag, skipper, but dond't let him yoomp on jou," Oopdyke growled in warning.

CHAPTER XXXII

VENNEKER BURSTS LOOSE

MUTTERING his opinion of the sense of such a warning, the skipper kicked aside the gun that had fallen at his feet from the stricken hand of the fallen man up

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the height and in doing so saw a light thrown upon at least one part of what promised to be a mystery to him at first. As he stepped forward to meet Neuman, holding the advantage of being the party approached, he had wondered why, before any disaster had occurred, and while yet the men on the upper slopes indubitably possessed all possible advantages of position and surprize, that white rag was flaunted in his face.

Oopdyke had said that Neuman and his white associates were not openly appearing in the tricky business of arousing black trouble on a friendly nation's soil, and all that had gone before seemed to show that the Hollander was right; yet here was the leader of them all coolly wagging the peace sign before the eyes of the very man against whom all the mischief was aimed.

That gun, too, which Saunders had kicked aside, was a trade gun of palpable German make. A clear sight caught in passing of one of those helmeted whites, with which the slopes were now dotted frequently, added a bit to the tale, for in the blazing sunlight the white was peeling off of face and arms, leaving the glistening black skin beneath.

"What d'you want?" the skipper demanded, stopping short twenty feet away from Neuman.

"Palaver," the man grinned. "White flag, y'know."

"Better hurry then. Seeing things as they are, there's too much jiggery-pokery afoot for me to trust any white flag in your hands. I won't guarantee old Long respecting it, anyhow, once he sees those poor devils your masquerading troops have shot below there."

Neuman started, and some of the sneer went out of his face.

"Long? Who's he? You mean Nuanou, don't you?"

"I mean Long, Long and his two-score men, my working and hunting party. Nuanou's about due, as well, if that interests you."

A flickering expression in Neuman's eyes told a vivid tale of a mind diseased. It was the fearful, cunning gleam to be detected at times in the eyes of a cornered fox—the gleam which is a composite of stark cowardice and bravado, and which lurks in the eyes even while the mouth corners writhe in a snarl of fury.

"Hurry up! What is it you want to say?" snapped Saunders. "I'd rather you had left that white rag behind and carried on man-fashion, though I doubt your ability to do that."

"Come up here," Neuman requested, turning his back and starting to climb again.

The skipper only paused to wave a signal to Oopdyke and Carter below, then followed quickly. He was armed. Neuman was not; and he determined not to pass out of sight of his men anyhow.

At the first turn in the cliffside Neuman halted.

"I'll be brief," he said, as the skipper came up. "Saunders, to tell the truth my cards are not big enough——"

"We make no terms with you," the skipper interrupted angrily. "You're on the wrong side of the border, but that's none o' my affair. I'm going to take up that land you traded to me, and if I meet you there I'll——"

"That's what I want to talk to you about, skipper. No use telling you lies. That fat Dutchman Oopdyke knows too much for that to be any good. I crossed over to this side because a rich vein has been found near here, and I could make things secure for myself by getting you in a mess with your authorities. I've done that, but I've left myself in a hole, too."

The man spoke coolly, as if what he confessed was the merest circumstance of daily life in the jungle. He glanced around and downward at Saunders' little camp.

"I don't like Oopdyke," he went on, shrugging his broad shoulders. "Haven't much love for you, for that matter, or any of your breed; but I have still a choice, and I choose you."

"What do you want?"

The skipper uttered the demand in sharp staccato jerks, half turning to depart. Neuman gripped his arm savagely.

"I want to swing in with you!"

"Nothing doing!" Saunders tugged his arm free.

"You stubborn mule!" Neuman said fiercely. "You shall hear me, by ——!"

The man beneath the veneer peeped out under stress, and thereby the skipper realised exactly how strong was the man's need. He smiled and turned away, keeping a wary eye about him against treachery.

"If you go, Saunders, you'll hear the death shriek of a friend!"

As across a screen the skipper saw in his

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memory that lone white figure passing painfully yet stubbornly over the ridge from Nuanou's mountain to the huge granite monolith he now stood on.

"Venneker?" he flashed, swinging around and jamming his gun muzzle against Neuman's breast.

Now it was the other's turn to start and look surprized. The menace of the weapon seemed to trouble him not a bit. Swiftly the glinting cunning returned to his eyes.

"It is better that you should listen to me," he said. "I suggest, also, that you think twice before you again violate the sanctity of the white flag by sticking a gun against my gizzard."

"I have asked you twice, and now again, for the last time, exactly what do you want?" the skipper returned shortly, seeking for a solution of the riddle concerning that friend threatened with death as he glared into the foxy eyes before him.

Neuman's start of surprize at mention of Venneker's name had not escaped him. He felt certain that it was not Venneker; yet think as he might he could think of no other man he called friend whose whereabouts were unknown to him right at that moment.

"You are so explosive, skipper, I don't know how to put it."

"Briefly as possible!" grunted Saunders.

"Good. Here we are then. Nuanou disappointed me. I'm standing alone now, with four of my countrymen and a tribe of blacks from the Kaiserin Augusta district. How you did it I don't know, but you've stirred up something in coming here that's too big for me. I have to get out. I know there's a government party on the way here—Lord knows what for—and it's time to go, anyway. You seek Nuanou's gewgaws. I know where they are. You don't. Join me, and we'll leave the Dutchman to face the music when your government lot arrive. My scouts say they'll be here today. While they're picking the bones out of the mess you and I'll slip over to Nuanou's stronghold and gather in the boodle and hop back to your leasehold. Safe then, because not only have I influence, but I believe you bullied old Koesch into giving you chits or passes before you split open his thick head."

"Anything more to say?" inquired the skipper coldly.

In that moment he stood face to face with Neuman alone; lost was every consideration of danger, friends, or treasure in the cold fury that assailed him at this abrupt, unexpected mention of that old charge of murder. Something in his glare frightened Neuman. Quickly he clapped fingers to his lips and shrilled a piercing whistle that echoed and reverberated among the crags. Sensing treachery the skipper raised his rifle to his hip, finger tremulous upon the trigger. The shot that should have ended Neuman's devious career right then was never sped; for something happened not far above them, a queer, indistinguishable sound was accompanied by the most hopelessly anguished note that surely could ever issue from human throat.

Saunders dropped the gun muzzle, his face working with a doubt as strong at that other, unseen man's agony. Who was it? Was it indeed a friend? Was Neuman playing one of those half-clever, half-——ish tricks of which he was master?

"Loog oudt, Ret!" bellowed Oopdyke below them. "Dere is Baldvin yoost coming! Ve oop schall come right avay!"

Somewhere in the dim fastnesses of the unburned jungle a bugle sounded shrilly, and the voice of a white man issuing orders. Oopdyke and Tod Carter leaped to their feet, their men with them, and at a yell from Carter old Long and his savages filed into the open.

"If they advance your friend dies horribly!" snapped Neuman. "Stop them! Quickly! I've got you trapped too!"

Again that horrible yell of anguish pealed forth. Saunders cupped his hands, turned toward the advancing party, and commanded them to halt. Carter and his seamen halted without hesitation; Oopdyke came on, with old Long and his men in doubt.

"Stop!" yelled the skipper.

Oopdyke stayed, staring upward in ludicrous amazement.

"Stop your —— torturers," he told Neuman. "Lead up to the scene of the sports, and let's see what you've got."

"You agree?"

"Yes, to see what you've got."

"Not enough! You agree to come in with me, and pull profit out of dead loss?"

"Yes, if you hold better cards than mine," grinned Saunders; and ventured into the lion's den without apparent tremors,

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though inwardly he was wrung with fears for that unknown victim above.

It must be Venneker, he decided. That air of surprize in Neuman's face was assumed to fool him, doubtless. His fear for the wreck of his friend of earlier days was strong enough urge to send him into greater danger than he guessed existed now. Neuman's confession was discounted at its merited rate. Allowing for a lot of cunning mixed with a little truth, there seemed little doubt that the man was indeed in a less comfortable position than had been expected. If that government party appeared and found him there, gone completely would be any hope of shunting the onus of invasion upon either Saunders or Oopdyke—and there were many cruel bits of sheer fiendishness to be explained away. Without doubt, if he could secure the skipper's cooperation, Neuman might not only get clear, but profit handsomely. That it would be at the expense of the lives or liberties of all his associates made no difference to such a man.

AS SAUNDERS climbed at the heels of his guide, he found himself passing beyond the view of his men below, and sharply called out to Neuman that he would go no farther. The moment he had uttered the shout he was sorry; for high up, in full view of his camp certainly, fleetingly visible to himself but out of sight of any one higher up the winding track, he caught sight of a great huddle of brown figures crouching among the boulders, keen-eyes and alert; they watched him and his camp, his guide and their destination like cats, and the headdress of the foremost was the headdress of Nuanou.

"All right, carry on," he called out, when Neuman scowled back at him with his fingers to his lips in readiness to repeat that whistle which had been followed before by such an appalling yell of human anguish.

Only for the fear of hearing another such cry, the docile following after such a leader, so soon after a night of forest fires and morning battle, would have bordered on the ridiculous. As it was, Saunders peered ahead and upward in momentary expectation of seeing poor Venneker trussed up with rawhide thongs under a spring, stuck full of bamboo splinters, or tortured in some other ingenious fashion.

"And yet old Venneker never squealed that way unless he had blue-devils," mused the skipper. "Who else could it be, though?"

He saw Neuman hesitate in his upward climb and glance around suspiciously. Then he caught a vague, distant-sounding sort of murmur which insistently said it could not be as distant as it sounded. Briefly he saw, also, other helmeted heads rise cautiously above protecting boulders, and these were unmistakable European heads. With scarcely a perceptible motion he bobbed his head and caught in his teeth the boat whistle that never was missing from the lanyard at his neck, and snatched another look to make sure if Nuanou were still on the job. That the white flag might lead to a trap he knew when he agreed to follow Neuman.

He was prepared for anything human, and most inhuman things after hearing that horrible yell; one blast of his whistle would bring his own men at the double run, and Long only waited for their initiative. But to send that shrill whistle blast meant sure and swift alarm in Neuman's camp, and there was that pitiful victim to be considered. What Neuman's momentary hesitation meant he could not at present know; he knew certainly that any rash movement of his would bring one more such a yell as that other, and that would be the last one.

"It must be Venneker!" he muttered, and kept the whistle silent.

Suddenly Neuman hurried forward; Saunders keeping at his heels, and in a moment came upon a broad ledge fronting upon a sheer drop of three hundred feet. But, cluttered as the ledge was with all the paraphernalia of a complete camp, masterly as was the selection of the site and the disposition of the garrison, out from all, stark and arresting, stood the tableau in the center of the camp around which all life seemed to wait.

Something seemed abruptly to have stopped the wheels of the camp. It stood like a machine shorn of power, or a gun that had jammed. Neuman, too, appeared to have forgotten the skipper at his back, and was intent upon a heliograph that flashed in the sun from an adjoining peak. Of the outside world nothing could be seen from the precise spot on which Saunders stood, yet he could readily perceive that, by moving a dozen steps in either direction, he could command a view of the entire country

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surrounding the great mountain except in one small angle—the angle which included the high, razor-back ridge across which he had seen Nuanou's ants crawling, and over which, too, he had watched Venneker creep to what now seemed to have proved his doom.

The thought forced him to start forward again, but the scene in the middle of the ledge was veiled from his sight by a double cordon of tensely waiting savages, each grimy, hideous face turned expectantly toward Neuman. Other white men appeared, as anxious as the rest, and the skipper grinned crookedly as he recognized them as that most evil of all evil whites, the unofficial hangers-on to the skirts of Colonial administration that has been left in the hands of a commercial company without conscience.

Neuman snapped a savage order, and swung on his heel. The flag of truce, mere subterfuge in the beginning, sank to his side and he snatched a big automatic pistol from the breast of his hunting shirt. Some of the cordon in the center moved aside in response to his command, and in a flash Saunders recognized the hostage held against his consent to accept the brazen proposition of Neuman. Strapped to a smooth rock with pack straps, with thongs at wrists and ankles, the unconscious figure of Ronald Moncrief hung limply.

At each side of him stood a painted, masked, indifferent savage; about his breast was a cunning network of grass cord, knotted with double hitches, through the meshes of which the naked flesh bulged horribly. Each of the savages held a stout stick thrust through the loops of the net at the victim's side, and they seemed to be waiting for an order to give another twist to their fiendish contrivance. Saunders knew the device only too well. It was a copy of inland China's "diamond vest." Nobody familiar with it could wonder at a yell of agony being wrung from a victim, no matter how tough of heart. Men who could endure burning bamboo splints thrust under toe and finger nails weakened when dressed in the diamond vest.

Neuman grew uneasy in the face of the skipper's abstraction, for his own business was pressing, and Saunders was too interested in Moncrief to answer him. The few men of Neuman's camp who had appeared, had vanished, whites and blacks together, and from two sides of the invisible area came the yells of surprized savages and the curses of fighting whites, interspersed with many shots.

"Speak, Saunders! Take me in with you, or down goes the white flag!" growled Neuman, the Luger pistol in his hand quivering by his side.

For answer the skipper's right foot shot out, fair and true, with all the skill and power of an old foot-baller behind it, and sent the pistol flying from bruised fingers into a crevice in the rocks. Then, even while Neuman poised to spring, Saunders' whistle shrilled out the summons to his waiting crew below, and, as if in echo, their gleeful yells pealed up to answer him. Oopdyke's heavy voice was heard along with the savage howls of Long's party beyond the obscuring cliff, and the sounds of fighting in that direction redoubled. Then the sound of a bugle shattered the forest quiet at the foot of the slope, sharp and shrill; crisp orders rang out in English along with the nervous, high-pitched shout of Baldwin; and the skipper's pistol spat as Neuman hurled himself forward.

The bullet thudded home in the thick muscular pad of Neuman's chest, but could not stop him. Then their powerful bodies met with a crash, and joined in a terrific hand-to-hand struggle for the possession of the skipper's pistol, swinging to his neck by the lanyard. It had been the dearest wish of Saunders to settle accounts with Neuman in this manner; but Moncrief's plight had made him bitter enough to kill the man with a bullet. Neuman's heavy charge, and groping hands, had forced him to drop his weapon, and once joined in conflict there was scant opportunity to regain a grip of it.

Saunders, in rolling over under the weight of his foe, saw Nuanou and his men slithering down the crags; he saw, too, as in a whirling mist, the two savages standing by Moncrief drop one after the other with long spears sticking through their breasts. But he saw these things dimly, for his own case was full of stern peril. Neuman's strength surprized him. The man seemed twice as powerful as on that distant day up the Kaiserin Augusta River when they had fought for a lease.

His head struck sharply upon the pistol, and he let go of Neuman with one hand to grasp it. His antagonist was as swift to grasp, and their hands met on the weapon—

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the skipper's over his shoulder, Neuman's around his neck. Thus they strove, panting into each other's faces, chest heaving against chest, and each stout right arm straining fiercely. By sheer virtue of his position Neuman gained the advantage by drawing the skipper's backward-bent arm still farther back; the fingers slipped, and Neuman's hand closed on the butt.

All Saunders' strength was put forth to stop that butt further twisting, and there they lay, in stalemate, while all around them the uproar of close fighting drew closer.

Grinding his teeth in stress of supreme effort, Neuman turned the pistol an inch, got the muzzle against Saunders' ear, and pulled the trigger, uttering a curse of breathless triumph. There was a dull click. The weapon was empty.

In the moment of his imagined victory, Neuman had relaxed his advantage and raised himself from the skipper's chest, expecting to see that auburn head transformed into a gory ruin.

Saunders was swift to seize the opening. With a steel-springlike rebound he flung Neuman entirely off, stumbled to his feet, and rushed in with his empty pistol swinging club-fashion. Neuman gave ground, fell still farther back, his eyes clouding with fear as he saw the threat in the piercing eyes fixed unwinkingly upon him.

The skipper stumbled as he missed his first aimed blow, and Neuman sprang aside to snatch up the discarded club of one of Moncrief's torturers. The club was brought down in an overhand blow from the pickup, and catching Saunders heavily on the shoulder sent him headlong against the cliff, where he all but fell. But even while Neuman swung the club again, the skipper saw and pounced upon the Luger pistol which he had sent flying from its owner's grip with that earlier flying kick.

As he flashed around and pressed the trigger, the magazine dropped out on the ground; the catch had become unfastened when the gun struck the rocks; already the murderous club was swung, and he saw a cold grin flash across Neuman's face.

Then like a bolt out of a blue sky something fell from the grim crag above them, and pitched fairly upon Neuman's shoulders, hurling him headlong upon the skipper, sending the club flying out into the abyss. The combined weight of the double assault hammered the wind out of Saunders, and for a moment he lay flattened out, dumbly aware of some terrific conflict going on over him. Then he struggled to force the weight from him, and got his head free.

The space about him seethed with battle; a gun spoke now and then, but all told it was a battle of steel and clubs, a grim, murderous fight. Suddenly he felt the incubus rolled from him, and, he staggered to his feet just as a white-clad party topped the ledge and hauled a small machine-gun into position. Sharply came the order, the gunners started a belt of cartridges, and a sound as of a stick being rattled along a fence ensued.

Saunders noted that his own lads were drawn aside, that Long's party had drawn back reluctantly, as evidenced by their attitudes until that gun began to speak, and that, flattened against the cliffside, Nuanou was leading his men swiftly along the ridge toward that point where the heliograph had been seen earlier.

Men fled pell-mell, white men and black, before that machine-gun, and Baldwin stood behind it beaming exultantly and swelling out his chest in martial style. At the edge of the camp four scowling Teutons capered with hands upraised, yelling for quarter, and at his feet the skipper found the answer to the question that was in his mind.

Locked in a death grip, Neuman and Venneker lay, slowly gasping out their last breath. Each gripped the other by the throat, and in Venneker's case the grip seemed all sufficient, for the man was a wreck physically. But Neuman was in full tide of muscular power, although wounded by the skipper's bullet, and although Venneker's fingers were sunk deeply in his neck the grip hardly explained so complete a result. The sight of a spreading patch of red earth beneath the locked men led to the discovery of the solution. To break their grip seemed impossible.

Venneker's lips moved faintly at the skipper's touch, as if demanding to be left to finish a task already done; but they could be rolled over, and in the turning Neuman's back was brought to view.

There lay the very efficient ally of Venneker's vengeance, for vengeance it proved to be as soon as the leader of the government

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party came up from completing his own job and saw the grappled pair.

"H'm! That's the blighter who started Venneker downhill, then used him in devious ways under threat of exposure!" he said. "Between him and Koesch——"

"Yes, I know," Saunders broke in, unwilling to hear the sordid tale again. "This is the most interesting exhibit at present. What is that old yarn about mysterious ways, and wonders to perform?"

He took hold of the black rubber and steel handle of a small pocket camp-ax which stuck out queerly from between Neuman's shoulder-blades. The blade still stuck in a billet of wood, where it had been driven by some departed wood-chopper and left when the fight began, no doubt; but behind the blade was a stout steel pick, which had also been left raised while splitting fuel, and this was buried deeply into Neuman's spine. The man had fallen upon it with Venneker's weight on top of him to drive it home, and the tide of battle had turned toward Justice through its agency.

Baldwin sidled up, meeting Saunders' eyes with a slight shudder, and gazed down at the dead men.

"Amazing!" he said.

"What's amazing?" snapped the skipper, irritably.

"Why—er—I started out after you, and found it was Venneker I should look for. Now I find him, and he's ——"

"He's atoned! Run away, little man. This is my affair. Go and help your partner round up the black sheep."

CHAPTER XXXIII

NUANOU'S TREASURE

THE black sheep required little rounding up. Like all their breed they accepted defeat with whole-hearted love for unbroken skins, and offered any kind of help and information their late opponents required. Between them and Oopdyke, with a little but weighty bit of data from Moncrief, the leader of the government party was not long left in doubt as to who was responsible for the wanton hunting of the local natives. That it had been simply a brutal plan of Neuman's, to bring embarrassment and punishment upon Saunders, was clear; and the leader collected his men and his captives for the march back to base.

Moncrief was made as comfortable as conditions permitted, and Venneker was decently buried; then Baldwin approached the skipper with something like apology in his manner.

"Er—I say, Saunders," he said, "if you want escort back to your ship, y'know, I've got the launch commander to agree to your marching in company with us. Irregular, of course, but—er——"

"Thanks," grinned Saunders, cheerfully, "but I came here on business. It would be a jape, though, to let you escort me back, wouldn't it? Sorry you can't even take Neuman back; but there's no hard feelings on my part, Baldwin. You're a brave little man, and I love all the breed, whether they're after me or for me. But take Moncrief along with you, won't you?"

Oopdyke watched the last of the departing column vanish into the forest, over which a haze of blue smoke still hung in the west.

"Dere goes der last ouf der reasons for me being here," he said. "Now I haf to go back to mine own side und lif der life ouf a plessed fat trader until someding else turns up to do, py chiminy. If Neuman hadn't turned dot Arab und his party loose on to der young missionary, pringing him up here yoost to torture him und to peeve der natifes dot lofed him, der natifes wouldn't haf told der government man der truth about these murdering raids ouf Neuman's up here. Und if you hadn't took der bull der horns by, und forced Neuman's hand, der plessed missionary would haf been killed, jou would haf been killed, und Oopdyke would haf been collared for der trouble maker yoost because I am der wrong side ouf der line upon. Vell, vell! Vat are you going to do now, Ret?"

"Satisfy myself about that gaudy loot of old Nuanou's; then take up my leasehold and see what is on it that made Neuman hold fast so tenaciously."

Oopdyke chuckled until his great frame shook, and his eyes twinkled keenly.

"First I shall tell you der story ouf Nuanou. He's a wicked old scalawag, Nuanou is. I peliefe you said he reminded you ouf a Liverpool Jew?"

"Carter tagged him for that at first sight."

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"He's not. Nor he ain't a Papuan, neither. He's von ouf dem half-plack, quarter-yellow, eighth white, eighth piebald mission niggers dot drifes half ouf der real missionaries crazy pefore dey ought to go dot way. He learned all dey could teach him, den asked for a hard station—und dey sent him up here, und he stopped for years und nefer went pack to der goot faders. Efer since der Flood seamen haf heard ouf der loot dot existed in dis mountain fastness. Soon after Nuanou come on der spot, der stories got more und more unpelievable, until Nuanou's footstool vos more in der hets ouf sailors dan profitable trade or efen smuggling.

"Many men come here looking for dot loot. Von, a leedle Liverpool-Cockney-Jew, nefer come back; but I know he lifed with Nuanou for many years before he got shot full ouf spears trying to get away mit der chewels out ouf dot chair. From him Nuanou got a lot ouf his Liverpool polish, but he could nefer get clear with any great amount ouf loot no more dan der white man did. Und loot was all Nuanou stayed here for. Der trone und stool was here long pefore efer he come; only since his arrifal haf they been called Nuanou's. Dot's because only since he come here has any attempt been made to rob der tribe ouf dose gew-gaws.

"Part ouf der tribal religion it iss to keep trone und footstool intact, reaty for der coming ouf der Great Fader from der Sun, or der Moon, or wherever iss it they peliefe he comes from. So Nuanou only lifes so long because he iss not so plucky as der leedle Liverpool-Cockney-Jew. Nuanou thinks he iss der cheese; but he iss watched night und day, und so soon as he goes oudt on a foraging or a fighting expedition nobody dares enter dot hut where stands der loot under penalty ouf a dirty death from der poisoned darts ouf two priestesses dot are always hidden in der tunnel under der chair. Und dot iss why you thought the things were unguarded. They don't need to haf visible guards, Ret. Not Nuanou himself can enter dot throne room alone und come oud alife.

"Yet Nuanou iss a great chief in efery-thing else. He showed the tribe how to make things they wanted; he pulled a lot ouf deep tricks in the mystical line; he can fight in white man style efen with primitive tools, und der tribe has kept free from intruders during his time here until Neuman showed himself a year back und showed him how to get away with the stones in der throne. Since that time Nuanou has been seeking a chance to get clear with a bag ouf jewels, und he succeeded a while ago und turned dem ofer to Neuman as first payment for his help in getting der rest. But Neuman played him crooked, so Nuanou swung ofer to your side, Ret, und dot's how things stand now.

"Neuman iss mutton; you are der blue-eyed boy; Nuanou iss still Nuanou, und I beliefe he iss now sneaking back along der ridge to make another attempt on that loot. Haf you seen him since——"

"No," retorted Saunders with a sunny grin; "I saw him at the end of the scrap, then missed him; so I put old Long and some of his boys on the trail, and I don't imagine Nuanou will get far away. I'm going over the ridge now. You'd better come along."

Carter mustered the *Black Pearl's* crew, and such of Long's men as remained, with Jacky and Horatius. They followed the skipper at a fast pace up the mountain to the beginning of the razor-back ridge, and as yet there was no visible opening in the sheer face of the opposite heights. Not until the middle of the narrow pathway was reached did the skipper's keen eyes pick out a dark blotch in the cliff which, on nearer approach, resolved itself into a passage, apparently into the bowels of the earth. There seemed scant secrecy about it, viewed from the ridge, yet Saunders and all his men knew well that the closest search from the inside had utterly failed to discover the other end of the tunnel.

CLOSE under the opening, a little to one side, opened the ravine where Carter and he were standing when Oopdyke's arrow message reached him. Then, at the foot of the cliff, well worn steps were visible, and in ten minutes the party stood within the cavern, blinking at the cold, black gloom of the unknown beyond. The natives chattered fearfully, and balked, until matches were struck and the *Black Pearl's* unawed crew pressed forward behind their skipper. The electric torch Saunders always carried had failed him now, when he needed it most, through the battery having become water-soaked.

Along a passage black as Erebus they

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crept, only able to catch fleeting views of grim walls and ghostly shadows in the moments when a match flared up. Then more steps appeared, in the light of the last match; steps irregular and steep, but worn as smooth as polished marble with countless feet through countless years; and as Saunders set foot upon the lowest step, his head and shoulders rising through a wide, round, well-like aperture, a hideous uproar burst above him, and the tunnel rumbled and resounded with the hubbub.

"Sounds like dissolution of parliament," growled Tod Carter; then he roared out a bitter curse as his foot struck into some unseen impediment and hurled him headlong against the steps.

He grabbed the skipper's legs, and clung like a limpet, while Saunders swore wholeheartedly down upon him and demanded to know the meaning of such nerve-testing tactics in such a place.

"Stumbled over a body, or something!" growled Carter, letting go his grip and groping around the base of the steps.

Oopdyke stepped aside cautiously, drawing a couple of Gilbert Islanders with him and bidding them listen for sounds of lurking foes. Then he called up to the skipper to come down, and together they blocked the tunnel with the bulk of their great frames while the natives searched with scent, touch, and hearing, holding ready weapons in case of a find. Jacky found first, and rose with a grunt, swinging that which he found toward Saunders' voice.

"Woman's head, cap'n!" he said.

At the same moment Horatius stumbled forward with an expressive exclamation.

"Him say him got one, too," Jacky reported.

"How d'ye know they're women?" the skipper wanted to know.

"Must be dose priestesses dot vas looging after Nuanou's integrity," Oopdyke put in with a vast expulsion of pent-up breath.

"How d'ye know?" repeated Saunders, impatiently.

The noise above increased momentarily, a scream arose from time to time, and the clash of weapons resounded as if the fight was confined within narrow limits, under a roof.

"Make catch long hair—see?"

Saunders felt a rope of hair like a horse's tail thrust into his hand, and something clammy and congealed adhered to it.

"Ugh! Chuck it away!" he growled.

A yell pealed out in the darkness overhead, and Jacky uttered a queer grunt.

"Dat ole Long, sah!" he asserted; and suddenly the skipper snatched at a possible explanation for the trouble overhead.

"Then he must be after Nuanou!" he cried. "Come on, Tod! Follow close, lads!" and plunged headlong up the steps, daring all unknown dangers of the black passage, intent only upon what was afoot before him.

He leaped through a round hole into the midst of what appeared to be pandemonium. Gradually he saw a faint light ahead, but it seemed far off, and between him and it the space was choked with struggling bodies; the air was suffocating with the reek of blood and sweat. Oopdyke followed Tod Carter, and took a step aside from the direction taken by Saunders. His guttural grunt announced another bit of enlightenment.

"We're here, Ret! Here iss der plessed trone you're after."

The skipper was too busy to answer. Jacky had yelled for Long, and had got an answer; where Long was fighting was where the *Black Pearl's* men ought to fight, since the old cannibal had undoubtedly proven his loyalty in a score of tight places.

"Make for the light, boys, and try not to knock old Long's lads over!"

The skipper thrust forward with the full weight of his crew behind him, peering through a swirling haze of dust and smoke to try to distinguish identities. Nobody appeared to take the least notice of his advent for a while; all were milling furiously around some central point whence came shrill howls and savage cries. Then some unhonored genius tossed a flaming bunch of dry grass into the interior, and in a moment the scene lay distinct to view, and as suddenly changed.

Long's men battled stoutly against twice their number of Nuanou's tribesmen over something on the ground between them. The greatly desired footstool and throne lay in an upturned heap at one side of the yawning hole through which the skipper had led his little band; and it required no brilliance of mind to understand that the entrance to the tunnel had been concealed by the throne when it stood in its rightful place.

But though Tod Carter and Oopdyke

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both grunted something about "stones," and "bunkum," the skipper's attention was too fully occupied by the general layout of the scene to notice. The sudden blaze of light forced the battling savages to pause in their struggle while the blindness passed from their eyes; and in that instant old Long uttered a weird and awe-inspiring howl, two of his men gathered up the object they had fought over, and all of the old cannibal's crew vanished through the black hole as if, in truth, the earth had swallowed them.

Then Nuanou's tribe awoke again, and surged forward, detecting for the first time the presence of the new intruders. Yet they turned rather to the yawning hole than to the skipper's gang.

"Drive 'em back; they're after our men!" the skipper shouted, and planted himself in the way of the charging mob.

"*Ja!* Und after Nuanou, too!" grunted Oopdyke, parrying a spear-thrust and flattening the none too aquiline features of the spearman with his pistol butt.

There was little ardor in the attack once the tribesmen discovered they were dealing with gun-armed stalwarts led by white men who grinned sunnily as they fought. Clear through the hut entrance, across the village, and into the ravine they were herded while women shrilled abuse at them and their drivers impartially.

The skipper led the way back to the hut, after satisfying himself that no rear attack threatened at the moment; and inside his boys tossed pieces of the roofing grass on to the dying blaze of the first torch while he and Oopdyke, pounced upon the great chair. Tod Carter gave his attention to the footstool. In thirty seconds the riddle was given up as past solution.

"Efery plessed stone iss gone!" Oopdyke blared, wide-eyed.

"Not a bloomin' bit o' glass left," Carter agreed, kicking over the stool disgustedly. Saunders stared at the things he had meant to have, which he had already seen with his own eyes stuck all over with rough-out stones of comfortable worth, and scratched his curly head.

"Nuanou—" he stopped abruptly as another thought came to him. "They were fighting over the old villain," he said, "but who was protecting him or who wanted to scrag him is more than I can fathom. Come on, lads; we'll cut after Long and find out. I told Long to keep Nuanou in sight, but not to kidnap him. Those men were all scrapping over Nuanou as if he was the only thing that mattered in all the world. Let's go!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONCLUSION

MIDWAY of the ridge was reached, and there was no sign of Long's party.

"Trafeling light," grunted Oopdyke.

"Runnin' like ——!" grumbled Tod Carter. "Got Nuanou, ain't they?"

Saunders tramped along in fuming silence. He too was beginning to wonder whether he had, after all, set a thief to catch a thief, and if he might not have seen the last of Long. The recent glimpse of those gouged holes so lately filled with gems had raised the almost certain supposition that Nuanou had at last succeeded in eluding the vigilance of his tribesmen and won clear with them by Long's help. He was almost persuaded, when his brooding eyes caught sight of a fresh red patch on the side of the declivitous slopes to the right. He halted and pointed it out.

"There's somebody without a head!" reported Carter, pitching a small stone at a heap of boulders, across which lay a distorted human carcass with a red puddle where the head ought to be.

"Make out who it is?"

"Only that it's a det man," grunted Oopdyke. "Whoever done it stole all der man's clothes, py Chiminy! Der plutty t'iefes!"

"Might as well, when they've taken his head," Saunders laughed harshly. "Leave him. We can't get to him anyhow. Forward, lads. Jacky and Horatius will pick up Long's trail if he's pushed off."

At the camp all doubts were cleared away by the appearance of Long himself, grinning broadly, gleeful as a boy with a blouseful of stolen apples. He accosted the skipper with a cataract of volubility so incomprehensible that Jacky had to interpret.

"Him say him follow Nuanou, sar. Him go bery quiet ober de ridge, into de hole, and a'most tumble ober two ol' womans wid blow-pipes dat hid in de dark while Nuanou passed dem up de steps. Dey make fo' holler, so him take dem heads. Oh, yes, sar!

"Den him go up to look see, and Nuanou him bery busy picking stones out ob de big chair. Bimeby somebody look in, dey make

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holler, and in a minit come plenty fighting mans dat try fo' take Nuanou's head. Long he say you tell him no let Nuanou get away, so him fight too; den you come; den him snatch Nuanou up and bring him along fo' here. Nuanou him say fo' Long to let him go, and he make him big chief wid plenty pigs, plenty cows, plenty womans. Long him say him belonga cap'n, so take de head of Nuanou and pitch him down de cliff."

Long was fumbling at a woven bag with feverish fingers, and red drops seeped through and fell upon his feet. Soon he tugged the draw-string apart, plunged in his hand, and pulled forth the top of a woolly head which stuck midway.

"Satan seize you and your ghastly trophies, Long!" Saunders swore angrily. "I don't want to see that. Where's the loot Nuanou was getting away with? Down the cliff, too?"

Long persevered with his bag, and presently flung the head of Nuanou at the skipper's feet.

"Him say all fineesh now," said Jacky. "Him say now you gib him gun for present, and he take his mans back home."

Saunders glared at the old cannibal, who stood looking on with fine indifference. His men, even Horatius himself, apparently regarded their term of service as already expired. Long attached the woven bag to his grass-mat belt, and stood waiting. Carter swore under his breath, and Oopdyke chuckled heavily, until the skipper's natural buoyancy of spirit came to the surface.

"All right," he laughed. "I suppose we lose. It's too bad to think of all those gems scattered down that impassible cliff by an old ruffian like Long. I believe he really considers things like this—" he kicked Nuanou's head, to the horror of Long—"like this, worth a million mere rubies or diamonds."

Oopdyke strolled away into the jungle with his rifle. He was about to go on alone, to betake himself into his own proper regions on his own proper business, but while a member of the camp he would undertake his share of the foraging. Almost as soon as he disappeared within the forest his rifle was heard, and Long gurgled something about that gun he had asked for.

"Right-oh!" agreed the skipper, resignedly. "Here, Carter, give the old villain that new repeater. It's nothing like as good as the old one. Give him one of the Luger pistols, too, and the rest of the stuff taken from Neuman's bunch you can give to Long's men. They'll never do much harm with 'em, for nobody'll sell 'em ammunition in German Papua, and nobody anywhere else will have that sort of shells."

The faces of Long and his men lighted up with unholy glee. Spears and bows were thrown aside while wondering eyes peered at wonderful little bits of mechanism; wide mouths hung open in amaze when one brawny savage pulled trigger on a loaded chamber which had been overlooked, and the bullet chunked into the mountain face, bringing down an avalanche of small débris about the party's ears.

"Long say, bery good, cap'n," said Jacky, edging up to the skipper as the gun went off. "But him bery sorry you no want dat head fo' go wid your odder heads he gib you. Him gib you bery fine collection, sar. Plenty chief be glad ob dem fine head fo' hang in him hut. Why you no like him?"

Jacky picked up Nuanou's head as he spoke, and regarded the gory trophy with glistening eyes. Saunders strode over to his packs, hauled one apart, and produced the three dried heads Long had first given him. These he dumped into one heap along with Nuanou's fresh top-piece, and told Jacky with a tone of disgust:

"Tell him to take the —— things and get out o' my sight. He's bad luck! All I came up here for was the bits o' colored glass in Nuanou's throne and footstool, and he's lost them for me. Go on, take 'em away, I say!"

He kicked the dried heads broadcast like so many soiled baseballs.

Long muttered; his men muttered; Horatius and Jacky swore in semi-civilized fashion. Oopdyke's gun was heard again in the forest. Suddenly Long dropped gun and pistol, setting his feet upon them, however, and began fumbling furiously at his belt. He produced the woven bag, and with eyes that clearly revealed the contempt he had for such a preference he tossed it across the scattered heads to Saunders. Then he picked up his weapons, and went about, crouching, until he had gathered up all the heads, spitting and swearing like a great black cat all the while.

"All ri', me go. G'bye," he muttered, and away he went with all his jubilant crew, perhaps at last convinced that the magic

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of the big white skipper was after all no more than lunacy.

Oopdyke emerged from the jungle, bearing a great pheasant and a bird of Paradise, as Saunders was eagerly examining the contents of the woven cane bag.

"Dot Long feller make goot time back home if he keep on like he start," the Dutchman chuckled, flinging down his gun and game. "You been scaring him, Ret?"

For answer the skipper scattered a handful of glittering stones broadcast, cursing fervidly, and Carter and Oopdyke picked some of them up to see for themselves. Saunders still held on to a good big handful of less glittering stones, and his bronzed face was frowning with uncertainty.

"Dese are glass!" grunted the Dutchman, wonderingly.

"Bits o' nigger-minstrel stuff!" Carter chimed in sourly. "I bet you let that old cannibal get away with the real stuff, heads and all!"

"I think not," replied the skipper, slowly. He let a trickling stream of rough stones pass from hand to hand, then handed some of them over for examination.

"Most of the gaudy stuff was fake," he said; "but these are the real thing. They'll pay expenses, anyhow."

"*Ja!*" grunted Oopdyke, handing back the stones he had scrutinized. "Dese iss der real stuff, Ret. But you'll do more as pay expenses. Come on, und I guide you to your own leasehold, den I leafe you, you lucky old rascal. See dis?"

He handed Saunders a lump of white quartz, in which the gold was stuck with astonishing richness. While old Tod Carter's eyes bulged, and the skipper's first surprize gave place to sunny smiles, Oopdyke was going through his pockets for other, smaller samples.

"Dot iss from your own territory, Ret," he said. "Yoost across der line iss it, und it's stuck in der side ouf der mountain like someboty had shot it in mit a scatter-gun."

"You got it now? Just while out shooting?"

"Not quite as easy as dot," laughed the big Hollander. "I find dis among Neuman's paggage, und den I put mine own boys to scouting for der source, dot's all. They report as much ouf it in sight as will load der schooner. You'll need a manacher on der ground unless you're going to give oop der sea altogether. How you going to get it down to der coast?"

"I'm going to freight it in the *Black Pearl*. She's carried many a queer freight, old whale, but none like this'll be. You'll stay and work it for me, and your men will pack it down to the river, see? Carter and I are sailors, not miners. Come on, and let's see El Dorado. I almost feel sorry for the poor beggars these stones were stolen from."

"Vell," growled the Hollander with a whimsical smile, "I peliefe it iss a goot idea to leafe dem stones here. They'll find 'em. Don't vorry, but they'll be snooping around here in a little while."

"What? Leave the sparklers we come through a million mile o' blasted jungle for?" yelled Tod Carter.

"I think so, too," Saunders rejoined, easily. "We'll leave them all these flashing glass jewels, which they'll probably value more than the handful of dull stones which we'll take along with us as souvenirs."

THE END

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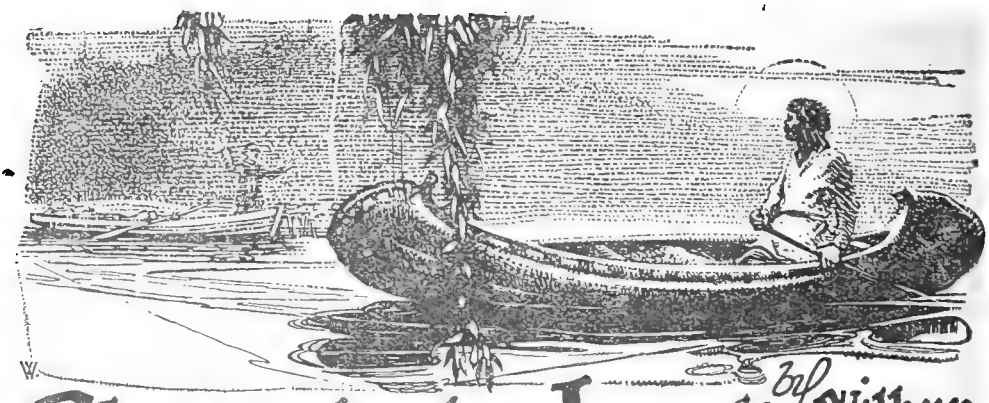

Cheechako Luck

by Wilbur Watkins

Author of "The End of The Trail," "The Leg of Moose Bill," etc.

TO JACK WORTH, on his first trip into the North, Fort Yukon appeared to be the sleepiest, the deadest of all the camps along the seven hundred miles of Yukon River that he had just traversed; and he had had a speaking acquaintance with all of them. He had beached his square-end tub of a boat before each one, scrambled up the bank and made optimistic and hopeful inquiries for some kind of work. Invariably the same answer had been returned—there was no work; it was a slow season; most of the mines were working only half their usual crews. So he had shoved off again and floated farther into the North, still optimistic and still hopeful.

But at Circle City his last dollar had gone for grub and by the time he had landed at Fort Yukon the last of the grub had passed down his throat. He was at the end of his rope, stranded in the deadest camp on the river, a fur-trading town whose seemingly ambitionless inhabitants trapped during the Winter and loafed all Summer.

There was no wage work of any kind. But he remained there because he could not go on, and, as events soon proved, he could not have chosen a better place to stay. For within a very short time the eyes of all Alaska were to be turned on that sleepy old town, and in one night the minds of its easy-going residents were to flame up with great ambition, with wild dreams and hopes of sudden riches.

This strange transformation began within a week from the time Worth landed. The cause of it was the coming of Husky Jim, a squat-bodied, slant-eyed, ragged, hungry-looking Eskimo trapper, bearing a dirty tobacco sack full of coarse placer-gold—the original germ from which the "gold fever" spread throughout the Yukon that Summer and led, indirectly, and by the help of a dead man, to the big gold strike on Moore Creek.

Husky Jim stepped from a down-river steamboat that late May afternoon on his first trip to the Fort in nearly two years. The last time he came he had fetched a small fortune in furs, the product of a season of trapping and shrewd trading with the Indians at the head of the Porcupine. The following morning he had awakened beneath a card table in the back room of Morton & Moore's store to be informed that he had sold his furs and lost the money at cards, a transaction of which the hooch-befuddled mind of the Eskimo could recall nothing. Jim, accordingly, had denounced Moore as a monumental thief, and vowing eternal vengeance said he would shake the dust of Fort Yukon from his moccasins forever.

But now he was back, in sorry straits it seemed, and quite strangely went straight to the man whom he claimed had robbed him. Was he there to ask assistance? To apologize for the fuss he had made and beg for a little credit at the store? Moore saw him coming and wondered, but his conjectures were all wrong. Jim walked into the

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store as though he owned it, grunted a good-natured greeting to Moore and produced the sack of gold in exchange for which he wanted a big outfit for the following Winter and wanted it quick.

Moore was there for business. His hard, heavy-jawed face revealed no sign of his surprize as he returned Jim's greeting, and reaching a long, powerful arm across the plank counter, grasped the sack of gold. His big hand trembled slightly when he poured the metal into it and noticed its bright yellow color. He knew instantly that it did not come from Circle, from the Chandelar, or any other adjacent camp. His sharp, well-practised eyes discerned that it was of almost the same color as Dawson gold and undoubtedly was of as high degree of fineness. For a moment he fingered it gloatingly, then inquired:

"Where you ketchum, Jim? Dawson?"

The Eskimo answered quickly:

"No, Circle. Me cut steamboat wood for Joe LaGoo."

Moore knew that he lied; that this was not Circle gold; but his face set in a "poker" stare and revealed no trace of his thoughts or suspicions. He dumped the gold onto the scale pan, balanced the beam and called Jim's attention to the weight.

"Circle gold not much good," he observed; "only fourteen dollars per ounce. Mebby so you get this at Dawson? Mebby so you find new creek, eh, Jim?"

"Circle," the Eskimo repeated and began reeling off a list of the supplies he wanted—his usual trapping and trading outfit except that he omitted steel traps and snare wire and ordered two picks and five shovels.

"AS SURE as the Lord made little green apples, that Siwash has found gold!"

Moore's emphatic declaration to his partner Morton as the two sat alone in the little back room of their store that night, expressed not only his opinion but that of every one to whom he had shown the bright yellow gold, and told of Jim's prevarication.

"He's blundered onto it somewhere up there on the Porcupine, and it's up to us to find out just where."

Morton, seated at a table performing fancy shuffles with a deck of cards, returned a half-disinterested answer:

"Well, suppose he has; fat chance we got findin' out anything from him. He hates us like I hate work and we'd be tail-enders gettin' in on a strike of his. What gets me is why he cashed his poke with us instead of at one of the other stores."

"I don't know that," Moore agreed, "and I don't savvy either how with his crafty old head he expected to get by with that crude story 'bout it being Circle gold. But that's beside the question. What we gotta do is to find out for sure if he did find that gold and if so, where. We hooked him a plenty the last time he was here, Harry, and I reckon we can do it again in a little more roundabout way perhaps. Anyway, let's take a fling at 'er."

His partner nodded assent and Moore stepped to the door and shouted lustily:

"Hey! John Robert! Come here a minute!"

A lithe young Indian emerged from a cabin in the rear of the store and came to them. Moore took a bottle of Hudson Bay rum from a case beneath the table, wrapped it in a dirty rag and handed it to the Indian with detailed instructions as to its disposal.

"Now go," he ordered; "give that to Sarah Malott and tell her what I have told you."

John seized the bottle, nodded with a knowing grin, and hurried away.

By morning of the following day happy, maudlin Husky Jim had told practically everybody in town about his wonderful strike on Jim Creek at the head of the Porcupine. He had found the gold late in the Spring, so he said, and had worked but a few days with a makeshift shovel and a tin plate for a pan, when lack of grub compelled him to leave. He had crossed overland, hit the Yukon just below Circle, flagged the first steamboat and come into the Fort. Now, he bragged, he was going back with a big outfit and dig out a boatload of gold.

"I KNEW it! I knew it!" Moore exulted when the word was brought to him; "the Siwash has played smack into our hands, Harry, and now that he's let the cat outa the bag, all we gotta do is to play him carefully, put a proposition before him that he can't turn down, and we're heeled for good and plenty. We'll hike outa here next Fall with our fortune in gold."

But his partner was not so enthusiastic. Morton before becoming a trader was a steamboat gambler, and the caution which

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that profession taught him was not forgotten.

"Hadn't we better go a little slow in this, Bill?" he suggested. "We got a pat hand all right, but still we ain't seen all the cards. There might be a couple pair of aces and a joker out that we don't know nothin' about."

"No chance, Harry! It's the straight dope, just as I figured from the first when that Siwash cashed in his dust for five dollars less per ounce than he knew it was worth. There's only one possible reason for that: he wanted us to think it Circle gold, and he'd hike outa here with a big outfit and nobody would be the wiser. He's foxy all right, but I'm just a hitch foxier; I know a Siwash like an open book, and when the hooch gets in 'em the truth spills out! This is our big chance, Harry, the one I came North to find fifteen years ago!"

He banged his hairy fist down upon the table, sprang up and paced the room mumbling to himself:

"Fifteen years in this —— forsaken ice box waitin' for a chance to get in first on a big stampede! And that's what she's gonta be! And I'm cocked and primed and ready to go! I'll load up the old *Leota* with ten ton o' grub and lead the biggest stampede since the Klondike days. O, yer settin' pretty, boy, this time! Yuh sure are settin' pretty!"

The *Leota*, the little flat-bottomed, stern-wheel tub which Morton & Moore used in their Porcupine trade was slipped from her mooring in a slough above town the following morning and snubbed at the steamboat landing. Late into the night a crew of men packed supplies aboard for stocking the new M and M trading-post which was to be the first store established in what was to be be Moore City, on Jim Creek, somewhere at the head of the Porcupine.

Toward evening when Husky Jim's supply of rum was exhausted and he seemed badly in need of a drink, Moore beckoned him into the back room of the store. He set a bottle and a glass on the table and invited—

"Help yourself, Jim; I reckon yuh need it."

And then in a sadly sympathetic voice:

"Just like yuh always do, Jim—get you'self into a mess and then blame other folks. Well, anyway yuh can't blame this on me. I'd like to help yuh. You know as well as I do that inside of a month there'll be a thousand stampeders headed for your Jim Creek; they'll travel faster than you will; they'll find yer creek, and you won't get so much as another smell of yer gold.

"Now this is what I'll do: The *Leota* pulls out in the morning; you agree to come with me as pilot, lead me to where you found that gold, and I'll give you back your poke now and when we get to Jim Creek I'll give you a complete outfit of grub for the Winter and all the hooch yuh can drink.

"How's that hit yuh? Take it or leave it; don't make much difference to me which, 'cause I'm goin' anyway. I'll make it in fifteen days with the steamboat where it'll take you close to two months to pole an outfit up. I wanta help yuh, Jim; better think 'er over."

The Eskimo poured and drank a glass of rum. In silence he stared for a moment into the eager eyes of the white man while in his own half-slant eyes there played a peculiar, twinkling light. His usually impassive face was a strange study of emotion, and Moore was uncertain as to whether he was about to laugh, to curse him or throw himself on his mercy. Jim finally smiled and spoke:

"Mebbyso you pretty good man, Beely Moore. I guess mebbyso I go weeth you."

More concealed his feeling of relief. He had won hands down. He counted the gold of Jim Creek as his own. From an inner room he brought Jim's tobacco sack of gold and gave it to him.

"When you show me where you found that," he said, "the outfit you ordered will be yours without a cent of cost."

"I show you," Jim replied, and the bargain was bound by a shake of hands.

WHILE the *Leota* was taking on cargo, Moore was picking his crew from the hundred or more men who were willing to sell dogs, boats, traps, guns, anything they possessed in order to meet Moore's requirement that, beside performing the duties of deck-hands, each man must show five hundred dollars with which to purchase an outfit from him at his own price when they reached Jim Creek. Twelve of this class he would take, and in addition to these there were to be four men who would draw good wages, on whose faithful services he could rely in all emergencies.

Three of the latter were friends of Moore, or as near friends as any man could be to the hard-driving, self-centered trader. They

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were in a way dependents who hung around the store of Morton & Moore, had their keep and did whatever work was required of them. The fourth man was the stranger, Jack Worth, the cheechako fresh from the "outside."

Worth was smitten with the gold madness along with the rest, only his case was more virulent than that of the others who had had it before. He begged like a child to be allowed to go on the *Leota*, but he had only a slim chance of being taken until Moore learned that he was a mechanic and thought his services might prove valuable in doctoring up the *Leota's* ancient engine in case of a break-down. So Worth was taken on at one half the wages given the other three men of the paid crew.

"Now see here, son," the trader admonished Worth when he hired him, "I'm doin' you a mighty big favor—a chance to stake good ground and maybe clean up big; so yuh gotta swear by all that's holy, that you'll stick to me and my interests through thick and thin; yuh savvy that?"

"I sure do, boss," Worth answered; "I'll be with you 'till the last dog is hung and his hide is on the fence!"

THE *Leota* cut loose at dawn, steamed down around the point below town, and turned her blunt nose up against the sluggish current of the Porcupine which she was due to buck for some five hundred miles.

There were eighteen men aboard including Morton and Moore. The store had been left in the capable hands of John Robert. Moore and Joe Clark, one of the paid crew, were to officiate as engineers with Worth and another man as helpers. Morton, Husky Jim and two others who knew the channel took turns in the pilot-house; the rest were divided into shifts as firemen, wood-cutters and deck-hands.

Steadily up the winding channel between green, forest-covered banks the *Leota* puffed, continually passing heavy laden poling boats laboriously pushed along by men with poles at the bow and stern, or attached to long lines dragged by sweating men on the open beach. The men on the steamer laughed and jeered as they passed:

"Heave hard, boys; we'll see yuh at Jim Creek 'bout next Spring!"

"To —— with yuh!" the answer would come; "we'll pass that old tub in the first big rapid."

The *Leota's* wheezy engine performed splendidly, and by evening the last of the stampeders who had started early had been passed.

Bill Moore's dream of fifteen hard, brutalizing years was indeed realized at last. His boat and his men formed the vanguard of the army of stampeders which soon would be in motion on every Alaskan waterway and trail, and he would see that his own discovery stakes were slapped on the exact spot where Husky Jim had found his gold. Contrary to past custom he did not hold himself aloof but laughed and joked with the members of his light-hearted crew, each of whom considered himself a potential millionaire, for the Eskimo told that Jim Creek was a good-sized stream and long, and if the pay-streak extended through a quarter of its length there would be ground for all and much left over for those to follow.

Worth was the gayest of them all. His hands were always busy at his work but his head was high up in the clouds where he saw visions of himself beside a tumbling mountain stream, down on his knees picking up nuggets the size of hen eggs from among the boulders.

The days passed swiftly; mile after mile of green banks slipped behind; the channel narrowed and became swifter; snow-capped mountains loomed ahead like clouds hanging motionless above the tree-tops on distant foot-hills. They reached these hills and the first rapid where the river plunged down through a deep cañon with but a narrow strip of sandy beach between the water and the rocky walls. The *Leota* had been through there often and without great difficulty puffed up and once more slipped into slow water where the channel wound between high timbered hills.

On the morning of the ninth day they passed Rampart House, the trading-post of Jean Calleau, Morton & Moore's bitter rival for the fur of the Porcupine Indians. Moore gave a jubilant shout when the low, log cabins came to view, strung along the left bank of the river.

"We're over half-way to Jim Creek, boys," he shouted, and hurried to the pilot house where he issued instructions to pull well over to the opposite bank.

"I don't want that cheap Canuck to get wise as to what we're up to," he explained;

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"I hope every stampeder in Alaska slips by under his snout before he gets hep."

Early the next morning they approached the mouth of the Salmon, a large tributary coming in from the North. Here they encountered difficulty with driftwood. The Salmon was still in high water stage and its swift yellow current was dotted with all manner of débris.

Moore was on shift in the engine room and scenting trouble shouted to the pilot to steer as far over as possible out of the muddy water. The pilot complied, but as the boat swerved sharply to the right the paddle wheel picked up a long, green spruce sapling. Instantly Moore shut off the power, to avert possible damage to the wheel, and seizing an ax ran back on the fantail to cut the drift free.

Joe Clark, coming on shift, saw the boat was rapidly drifting upon a half-submerged sandbar scarce a hundred yards away, and without a thought as to possible reasons for Moore's absence from the throttle, considering only the immediate danger to the boat, he rushed forward and turned the steam on full speed ahead. Instantly there rang from the rear of the boat a piercing, agonized scream. Morton from the pilot house saw what had happened. When the power was turned on the big connecting beam had descended on Moore's legs as he knelt on the fantail hacking at the spruce.

"Shut 'er off! Shut 'er off!" he cried, and rushed to the assistance of his partner. "My ——! You've broken Billy's leg!"

Moore had wriggled from beneath the beam and as Morton reached him, lay crumpled in a senseless heap on the deck.

With a gentle bump the *Leota* struck, slid upon the sandbar and came to rest.

On the part of the crew there was a wild scramble for handspikes, and most of them leaped over the side in a frantic effort to pry the boat off before she settled deep in the sand. Morton had the injured man carried to a bed where he examined the broken legs. Broken they were, hopelessly shattered half-way between the ankle and the knee. With the help of Orth he checked the bleeding and had the legs dressed as well as possible before Moore regained consciousness. Then he called the men from their work and addressed them:

"Boys, Bill's hurt mighty bad. We gotta put him in a boat with four men at the oars and get him back to the Fort in double quick time. Now who will volunteer to go?"

A sullen growl went up. On the part of the men who were working their passage there was but one answer:

"Not me! I calculate to see Jim Creek 'fore I turn tail."

Morton realized that he could expect nothing of them so turned to the men who drew wages.

"It's up to you, then," he declared; "Bill hired you to stick with him, and Lord knows he needs you now! It means life or death to him—you'll have to take him back!"

But three of the men flatly refused:

"Nothin' doin', Harry! We hired out to go to Jim Creek and we're goin'!"

The fourth man, the stranger, Jack Orth, agreed to go. Choking back his disappointment, struggling to hold a steady voice, he declared simply:

"I told the boss I'd stick with him and I'll keep my promise, but I sure hate to miss out

on this stampede. I got folks back in the States depending on me to make good, and it looked like this was my one big chance."

The other men, relieved that some one was willing to go, were trying to console Orth with praises for his sacrifice and promises that "we'll stake yuh in," "we'll see yer taken care of, kid," when another voice piped up—

"I go too!"

It was Husky Jim, and he was immediately silenced by an angry howl:

"Nothin' doin', Siwash! Yer booked to lead the way to Jim Creek!"

As he could not afford to let Jim go, and none of the others would give in, Morton was forced to the decision that Orth should take Moore back as far as Rampart House

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and there hire a crew of Indians for the trip to the Fort.

Accordingly Moore, suffering intense agony, but with jaws clamped and uttering no sound, was lowered into a boat, a bottle of rum placed beside him, a few provisions and utensils put aboard, and with Jack Orth pulling on the oars the boat moved swiftly downstream, while the remaining crew once more seized their handspikes and set to work to free the *Leota* from the bar.

For a long time Moore remained silent and motionless on the bottom of the boat staring straight up at the clear blue sky. Presently he raised himself on one elbow, stared for a moment at Orth sweating at the oars, then burst forth with bitter blasphemy and curses:

"—— of a fix I'm in! Yer a —— fool, kid; why didn't yuh stay back there with that pack of dogs—dirty, rotten curs! I could die like a wolf in a trap for all they care, as long as they get smell of gold! But I ain't dead yet! —— no! They'll pay fer this 'fore I'm through with 'em!"

He seized the bottle of rum and drank greedily, and continued to guzzle until he fell into a stupor and then asleep.

He was still sleeping when the boat grounded on the beach in front of Rampart House. Orth sprang out and ran shouting up the bank. A half dozen Indians ran to meet him to learn the cause of the commotion.

In the big log store building he found Calleau, a tall, lean, leather-faced fellow with a long beak of a nose and the hard, cruel eyes of a snake.

"Can you help me get four Indians?" Orth cried. "I have a man down there with two busted pins and I got to get him to a doctor quick!"

"Sure!" the trader answered, and started for the door. "I'll get yuh some good husky boys that can pull an oar. How'd it happen? Who got hurt?"

"Bill Moore from Fort Yukon."

Calleau stopped instantly with a black scowl overspreading his face.

"Moore, eh!" he snarled; "well, I'll tell yuh what, pardner; you've hit the wrong camp fer help! Not a Siwash of mine will raise a hand to help that thievin' liar! He's bucked me for five years in my own territory. I bought out his Crow River post and he promised to stay off the Porcupine; then the very next year sends his Siwash, John Robert, with an outfit in on the Shenjek to trade right under my nose. Help him! I'd see him in —— first! That's where he belongs! He can lay there and die for all o' me!"

That was Calleau's final decision. All of Orth's pleading in the name of human kindness was to no avail, and he could not induce an Indian, against Calleau's orders, to accompany him. The trader followed him to the boat and stood for a moment looking down upon his sleeping, broken enemy.

"Die, you dog!" he muttered. "I wanta see yuh die!"

Orth shoved off alone. Ahead stretched three hundred miles of winding river. He had no idea how many days it would take to cover that distance, but he felt certain that, unless he found help mighty soon—an Indian fish camp, perhaps, or some white trappers—Moore's chance of pulling through was very slim. And for that one forlorn chance Orth had paid a fortune. That was a bitter thought indeed, but he bowed his back and heaved with all his strength on the oars.

Toward evening Moore awakened, and, although he suffered intense pain he neither whined nor uttered another word of complaint. He thanked Orth for what he was doing; planned what had best be done when they reached the Fort: He would have the doctor there dress the legs and then take the first boat to the Government Hospital at Tanana. He wondered if both limbs would have to be amputated, and, if so, could he manage to get around on cork ones. He became curious to look at the broken legs and in spite of Orth's protest peeled away the blanket which swathed them. As he did so a number of big black flies buzzed up from the bruised, bleeding flesh.

"My ——! The flies have got at me!"

It was more a groan than a cry, and Moore's nerve was gone. For the first time he realized the extent of his injuries and the slimness of his chance to live. He seized the bottle of rum once more and sucked greedily at the contents. Orth replaced the blanket, drenched it with cold water to ease the pain and keep the flies away, and rowed on, pausing now and then to throw more water over the blanket.

At dusk he drew to shore to prepare himself some food. He tied the boat and was breaking sticks for a fire when he saw a dark

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object sweep around a bend in the river a few hundred yards upstream. It was a man in a birch canoe. Orth rushed to the water's edge, frantically waving his arms and shouting at the top of his lungs. The canoe swerved toward him, approached rapidly under swift strokes of a paddle, grounded on the sandy beach, and Husky Jim sprang out.

"Me come to help," he said.

The sound of the Eskimo's voice brought Moore's head rearing up above the gunwale of the boat.

"You here!" he cried. "Why—you left the *Leota*. You danged Siwash dog, you've quit the boat! Go back! Go back there—show Morton where you found that gold or I'll——!"

"Me find no gold."

Jim spoke as calmly as though he told the time of day.

"You found no gold! ! !"

"No, I fool you, Beely Moore; I make you spend plenty money for nothing 'cause you steal my fur. I work last winter for big company at Dawson; get that gold; come to Fort, make you think I find new creek. I fool you plenty, Beely Moore, but no like for see you die. I come help you."

Under this startling news Moore fell back as if from a blow. For a moment he lay quite still, doubting his hearing, doubting the reality of it all, until consciousness of the pain in his legs reminded him that he was awake and sane.

"My ——!" he groaned. "Did you tell Morton! Does he know!"

Jim shook his head.

"No. He kill me if he find out. I sneak away when boat stop for wood; I steal canoe at Indian camp; I go with you to doctor. No like for see you die."

Then with every ounce of strength in his pain-racked body Moore launched forth in cursing denunciation of Jim, and under it all Jim smiled blandly and set about helping Orth prepare supper. Moore was still cursing feebly when they were ready to go. Jim left his canoe and took a place in the boat and possession of the one pair of oars. He insisted that Worth get some rest and the tired white man curled up in the bow and went to sleep. Moore rested but little. All night long he tossed and moaned and cursed the Eskimo.

The sun was some two hours high when Jim aroused Worth and they pulled to shore for breakfast. Moore was awake, suffering intense pain and burning with fever. They tried to persuade him to take some nourishment but he refused, begging only for water of which they gave him all he could drink. Worth examined the legs again. The mangled flesh had turned blue-black in color. Jim shook his head solemnly.

"Pretty much no good," he muttered.

Once more they shoved off with Worth at the oars and Jim kneeling beside Moore, intermittently pouring cold water over the shattered legs. By noon Moore was raving in delirium; he was living again those days of boundless hope which preceded the accident; he paced once more the deck of the old *Leota* with two strong legs beneath him and a fortune just ahead. He moaned and talked of dreams, the dreams that might have become realities had there been no accident and there had been gold on Jim Creek.

He revealed that his ambition was to be a gentleman; to take his gold and beat back to city trails, to the old home town he had left a quarter of a century ago, and the woman who still awaited him there. With money, friends and the refining comforts of civilization, he felt that all the brutalizing effect of his long years in the North could be erased, and he would be a man among real men once more. Money was all he needed, and the money awaited him there on the bed-rock of Jim Creek.

"Feed her the wood, boys!" he shouted. "Fill her old belly plumb full! We gotta make time in this slow water. There'll be a heap of trouble and delay when we start to buck the rapids."

Moore's voice steadily became weaker toward evening, and finally trailed off into silence, and he slept. When the sun swung low to the hilltop to the southwest, Worth laid down the oars for a moment and stretched his aching arms.

"How far you reckon we've come, Jim?" he asked.

"See that high hill?" the Eskimo answered, pointing toward a point ahead where the timbered ridges rising on either hand seemed to come almost together; "white man call that Upper Rampart. I know him 'bout two hundred mile from Fort."

"Two hundred! It might as well be a million. I don't reckon Moore's got much show to pull through; do you, Jim?"

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"No," the Eskimo answered; "I guess pretty queek him die."

They changed seats and Jim took up the oars. Worth reached over and placed a hand on Moore's burning forehead. But it burned no longer. The flesh he touched was cold. With a horrified exclamation he jerked the hand away:

"My ——, Jim! He's dead now! !"

ON A narrow strip of beach close to where a large creek gashed down through the almost precipitous twenty foot wall of the Upper Ramparts, they pulled to shore, unloaded the body of Moore and made camp for the night. While Worth prepared supper Jim looked along the foot of the cliff for a place where the soil might be deep enough to permit a grave. When he returned he shook his head gloomily.

"No dirt," he said; "in morning we go up creek and mebbyso find plenty dirt."

They ate supper, and before rolling up in his blanket for the night Jim chopped down a dead spruce and flattened it on one end to form a rude shovel.

Early the next morning they set out to find a place for the grave. They had followed up the creek for three hundred yards or more through a steep, rocky gorge, when the walls suddenly curved away and the men emerged into a wider basin densely covered with spruce timber. Here the soil was deep enough for their purpose. They chose a spot in a little park, returned, carried the dead man there and laid him on the ground at the edge of the open space. With the crude shovel and their ax they set to work to dig the grave.

The ground was thawed—a big help. They gouged and scraped down through moss, two feet of silt and muck, and struck fine gravel and sand which quickly gave way to coarse gravel and boulders. At a depth of about four feet the wood shovel bumped solid against bed-rock.

"Guess we're about as far as we'll get," Worth remarked.

He pried loose a boulder and stooped to pick it up. Noticing the peculiar yellow color of the earth packed around the edges and on the bottom of the hole where the rock had lain he paused. Suddenly he reached down and came up with a double handful of this earth. Without a word he extended his opened hands toward Jim, and the morning sunlight, slanting down above the circling tree-tops, flashed brilliantly on many particles of gold. In his hand Worth held more of gold than sand and gravel.

Without a trace of emotion in either face or voice the Eskimo said—

"I guess mebbyso we find plenty money, kid."

"It looks that way! !"

Worth clinched the gold in his hands and danced up and down in the hole while from his open mouth burst wild, hysterical laughter.

For the rest of the day they gouged in the hole, cut trenches in every direction, and everywhere on bed-rock they found the same rich pay. They were certain then that they had not blundered on a mere pocket but that a rich pay-streak was concentrated, for no one could judge how far, up along the bottom of that rock-bound stream.

When hunger finally drove them from their work and they started back to the boat, the sudden rising of a flock of ravens from a dark object on the ground at the edge of the clearing, reminded them of a task yet unfinished. They ate supper and returned, scraped out a shallow hole and buried Moore.

"This is only temporary, old boss," Worth apologized to the corpse; "when we come back we'll have you planted up there on the point and raise a monument over you a hundred feet in the air. We ain't forgettin' that your hard luck was the cause of this, and we're a heap obliged to what's left of you."

The next morning they christened the stream "Moore Creek," in honor of the dead man, drove their location stakes, dug out a sock full of gold, and resumed their journey to the Fort.

LATE that Fall when the old *Leota* came nosing back downstream her crew of disgusted gold seekers were astounded to see a log-cabin town topping the bluff at the Upper Ramparts where not so much as a tent had stood when they passed there three months before. The water-front below was strewn with every manner of craft the North has ever seen, and everywhere, along the beach and moving up and down the steep hillside were busy crowds of men and countless howling dogs. The *Leota* turned in as close as possible to the

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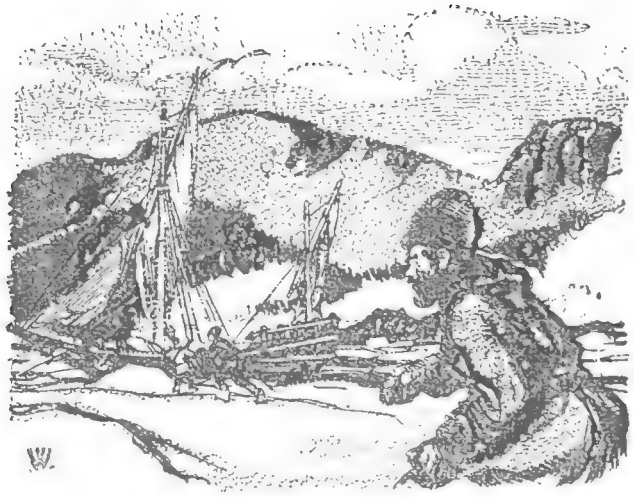
cluttered bank and some one shouted to the men on shore:

"Helloo! What's up! What yuh got here!"

"What!" a sarcastic voice replied. "Where have you all been hidin' out at! This is Moore City, richest gold camp since the Klondike strike! A cheechalker and a Siwash blundered onto it last Summer and hogged the best ground. You boys might just as well keep driftin'; yer too late. Country's staked fer thirty miles around."



THE NET

by

Harold Lamb

Author of "The Gate in the Sky," "The Wolf-Chaser," etc.

KAM knew that the long night of Winter was nearly over. He knew it by the wisdom of his six years. His wolf dog no longer burrowed so deep in the snow of twilights and the ice of the river was cracking.

For Father Yenesei was rising out of his long sleep, throwing off the white coverlet of ice and snow. At his headquarters in the Syansk Mountains far to the south the snow was melting and the black water was rushing down with the ice floes toward the bend in the Yenesei where the hills of Mongolia meet the plain of Siberia—still called Muscovy in that year of the late seventeenth century—where was the hut of Kam.

Well did little Kam know the moods of Father Yenesei. Kam himself had no father; he lived with old Ostak, the blind fisherman at the bend of the river.

During the past Winter the boy had played with the treasures of Ostak, a walrus head on which the skin was wrinkled like the skin of a dried apple, a bit of carved ivory, a silver talisman, cast up from the wreck of some trader's vessel, and a long iron whaling spear.

For Ostak, in the time before the light went from his eyes had been a man of the North, a killer of animals on the edge of the White Sea, a man largely thewed and savage of temper. Kam played on the skin of a polar bear. Kam was no longer a child. He played at killing the walrus head with the spear.

"*Tchail*" he cried. "Soon I will run upon the walrus herds. I have already speared a salmon in the river. You know it, Uncle Ostak."

"Aye," the old Buriat murmured, "you are a rare young buck. You are the eyes of Ostak, just as your sister Aina is my hand."

It was Kam's task to lead the blind fisher to the skiff, to find him his nets, to carry the cleaned fish to the village some miles away. His hours of work were long, for Ostak moved slowly and toiled painfully. The need of work and of guiding the blind had made Kam alert and shrewd for his age.

When the ice would be gone, and the labors of the day done, Kam would play with his wolf dog on the bank of Father Yenesei, watching the reflection of the pines

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in the water of the round bay by which the hut was built. He would count the ships passing up or down, traders' luggers, the sailing skiffs that bore black-robed priests from Muscovy, who wore strange, square hats and gave presents—sometimes.

But on this warm day in the Month of the Fox, when the silver sun of the past months was turning to gold and the snow was damp under foot, the only vessel within Kam's range of vision was an ice-bound lugger a mile up-stream, and he was watching the approach of three men with a dog sledge.

Kam knew the three. They were Muscovites, distinguished personages who owned the sailing ship that had been Winter-bound in the upper reaches of the river by an early freezing of Father Yenesei.

Frequently Kam had seen them in the Buriat village near by. Their presence had added zest to the dull Winter for him. From the inn door he had listened while they sang gigantic songs and kicked on the floor. At times they played with an assortment of small colored pictures upon a table and emptied mugs of vodka at a great rate.

They brought wonderful, painted dolls and bead work, with colored cloths to exchange at the inn for food and vodka. When they danced with the Buriat woman to the two-stringed fiddles, the sweat flew from their faces and the floor shook under their boots, so high did they jump.

In short they were demigods, capital fellows, regular *batyrs*, or heroes. Kam scrutinized their approach to his hut with emotion, and his black eyes opened wide at the guttural oaths that announced the trio had missed their way in heading back to the lugger from the village.

"Give us a drink to warm our gullets, uncle," they shouted at Ostak, who was feeding fish fins to his dogs.

Kam was lost in admiration. The faces of the demigods were red as the crimson of the northern lights at the time when the merry dancers* were leaping in the air above the horizon. Their breath was as fragrant as wine. So it was, in fact. Their beards were like horses' manes, compared to the long white mustache of Ostak that was like the fangs of a walrus.

"Kam," grunted Ostak as if he had observed the men, "go and bid your sister draw *tarasun* from the cask and give these to drink."

"Nay," responded the boy eagerly, "Aina is down at the ice, the hole in the ice, spear-fishing."

"Draw the *tarasun* yourself. Give to each of these strangers for they thirst. I can not see their number."

The leader of the three emptied the bowl of fermented mare's milk at a gulp.

"So, you are blind, uncle. Well," he laughed, tossing the bowl to Kam, "you will behold the angels in Heaven, so don't weep about it. Come along, Fedor and Lak— —— take your Finnish name—Lakumainen."

He waved good-by to the impassive Ostak and whipped up the dogs that drew the sledge slowly over the heavy snow. When they could not start the sledge, instead of giving it a push, he kicked the dogs until, snarling, they got under way.

Kam was surprized that a demigod should beat dogs. Ostak, despite his surly moods, always cared for his few wolf-breeds.

When Fedor, the smaller of the two Russians, and the gigantic Finn trailed after the sledge, Kam brought up the rear. Having given the exalted strangers to drink he felt that he had earned the privilege of following them a while.

"Lift up your heels, my lads," sang out the leader of the sailors. "We've got this food to stow away and the ice may break loose any day now. You'll have to step a measure, then, because Father Yenesei isn't any smooth maiden to handle, you know."

Nevertheless he did not head directly for the distant vessel, but circled to go by the hole in the ice where Aina stood with her spear. Several salmon, already frozen, lay by her.

Fedor and the Finn followed, accompanied by Kam, who tried to swagger or rather lurch as they did.

Aina did not look up, she had already scanned them carefully. She was a slender Buriat, with a tiny mouth and sharp, black eyes with curving lids. In her fox skins and horsehide boots she looked much like a boy, except for the moonlike roundness of her cheeks.

"*Hai*, little seal," called out Stolkei, leader of the sailors, "give's a fish—kish. Pretty little Aina, a kiss."

He tossed a silver coin on the ice after

* The colored flames that are often seen in the arc of the northern lights.

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long fumbling with his leather mitt in the flat looking wallet at his belt. Signing to the Finn to stow the salmon on the sledge, he essayed a bear-like clutch at the girl, who slipped away around the water-hole.

"Nay," she said, "begone!"

Stolkei tried to follow the alert girl around the black gap in the ice, failed and began to mutter—

"*Hai, hai*, Aina, my lass!"

Shaking his head he moved off again while Lak beat the dogs into motion. Kam paused to stare admiringly at the torn, cloth cap of the Russian skipper, the soiled, embroidered blue shirt that showed where he had flung open his bearskin *svitza*. Stolkei was roaring a song that had come into his head:

"*Hai, hai*, Aina, lass,
Is wild, is fur-ious wild!
Hai, hai, Aina lass—
Don't get wild, my child!"

Lak, grinning, tried to take up the song. Only Fedor was silent, and cast a long glance over his shoulder at the watching girl.

Kam, pleased, began to dance around his sister, repeating—

"Don't get wild, my child!" until she boxed his ears roundly.

"Ow," he cried. "I like the song. I like those masters of the river. I wish we had them for uncles instead of old Ostak."

"Be quiet!" She added reflectively—"They won't ever pass through the dog-world in *kanun-kotan*, the sky-heaven, if they thrash their dogs like that."

Both children had spent many an evening in the dark listening to old Ostak telling of the sky-worlds. Even Kam knew that *sunyesun*, the soul, was caught up by the nets that came down from the sky, and thus left the body of a man.

Although he looked hard he had never seen the nets, nor the cloud people, the people of ancient times who lowered the nets and caught up the souls of men. But the sky-world was plainly to be seen, or rather its gate might be seen. Almost every clear night it stood there, the great arch of soft white flame in the northern sky.

Through this arch the soul must pass, riding a horse if the animal slain on the grave of the dead man was fat and strong; or leading it, if the horse were thin and weak. The soul must have a warm suit of clothes laid on the grave, for it was very cold in the *kanun-kotan*.

And the soul must pass through the sky-worlds of dogs, and those of the reindeer and the horse, and other beasts. And if the man in life had mistreated a dog or reindeer or horse, he would be bitten or hurt on his long journey through the *kanun-kotan*.

Also, if he brought with him anything that had been stolen on earth, the thing would be claimed by the *sunyesun* of its owner in the sky.

Kam thought to himself that when his time came he would ride regally through all the sky-worlds on a pony. All his garments would be of the richest sable and fox. All the beasts in each world would let him pass friendlily, and his wolf dog would be there to bark a greeting.

Everything that went with Kam in the net that came down from the *kanun-kotan* for him would be quite certainly and unquestionably his own, so no angry soul would take the coat off his back or the spear from his hand. Then he would be welcomed triumphantly by the One-Being-on-High, and have plenty of fat meat to set his teeth in and a walrus head to roll from star to star.

But Aina of the brooding eyes and soft voice would shiver when he mentioned this.

"*Ai-a*," she would sigh, for the flood of life was strong in her, "I hope when the net comes down for me it will be in the hands of our father and mother. I hope no angry soul will send the net for you, either. We must take care and be gentle with Ostak, for his time is near."

Until he was six years of age, it had puzzled Kam how Ostak would find his way in the *kanun-kotan*, since he could not see. Aina said it would be managed. And now Kam saw that it, indeed, would be simple. The horse, having good eyes, would see to choose the way and Ostak would tell him where to go, just as the fisher told Kam where to guide him.

THE next day the sun was brighter. The ice began to move sluggishly toward the north, leaving strips of black water visible. Although walking to shore was now hard work, Stolkei announced that he would go back to the village a last time for some snuff.

Before setting out he ordered Fedor and the Finn to let go the rusty anchor to avoid drifting, and to mend the lug sails.

When the anchor was down the two

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watched until Stolkei was out of sight. Fedor looked long from a black speck on the still unbroken ice of the bay by Ostak's hut to the broad face of the Finn.

"Lak," he muttered, and coughed.

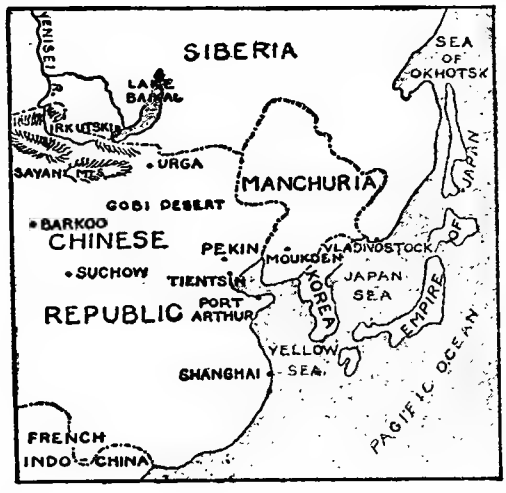
"Lak," he began again, "you and I are chums, ain't we?"

A smile on Fedor's thin, red face disclosed black teeth. He closed one red-veined eye.

"That girl of Ostak's—she's alone over there."

Looking at the speck on the ice Lak nodded. His thoughts had been running in that direction since he woke up at noon.

"It'll be a long stretch down the Yenesei,



with the ice ahead of us and behind. We won't be ashore again for a pretty spell, Lak. Look here, that Buriat girl is as sleek as a fox."

The big sailor rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Those —— Buriats at the village—" he was beginning.

"They won't know, Lak—why should they? Look here, Ostak's blind. There's no other soul along the bay, there. She'll think we want more salmon. I'll manage her." Fedor chuckled. "I'll say we'll clap her in the hatch in the ice if she doesn't come along to the ship. I'll manage her, if you'll carry her to the ship."

"What about the master?"

"The —— take the master—as he will, some day. Papa Stolkei has an eye for a girl, I tell you. Anyway, lad, he can't do anything. As for the Buriats, they are oxen! What do they care for Uncle Ostak? They know we have muskets, and they won't want a hole in their pelts just because of Ostak's brat."

The Finn's heavy face had not changed.

"If I carry her to the ship, I keep her for a while. You agree to that, Master Fedor?"

The turkey-faced sailor scowled. Then his brow cleared and he held out his hand.

"Agreed. Why, you're my chum, Lak."

FOR once Ostak's fingers were not busied at the making of nets, and Kam was not playing with the treasures on the bearskin. The boy stared up, puzzled, at Stolkei who was sitting on the guest's side of the fire in the hut, his great coat open, drinking *tarasun*.

"I'll open your mouth for you, Uncle Ostak," the Russian was saying. "I'll let you talk terms. You can name the *kalym*, the first payment, yourself. How much—eh? Spit it out!"

But Ostak shook his head, his eyes closed.

"Nay, master. The girl is not a woman yet, for going with you."

"*Tchai*, Uncle Ostak," Stolkei smiled, "you are blind enough. Aina is pretty as a fox. If she stays here some stripling from the village will come to open your mouth to talk of marriage."

"Nay. The girl is my hand, to work with. When the ice is on the river I can not catch the fish. Soon little Kam will be able to use the spear, but not now."

Ostak spoke harshly. The foster children he had taken in had found their way into his heart, after a fashion. Irritable as he was with them, Ostak saw that they had the best of the food, that skins were brought for their garments, even silk and beads and iron ornaments for Aina.

"Well, you are a fool." Stolkei was angered. "You are a doddering old *Anakhay*—a one-eyed evil-doer to children. I tell you I will pay a price, a good price. The girl will see Russia——"

"She would not live," again Ostak shook his head. "She is shy and quiet. She is for her own land. Go your way, master."

Stolkei grew red with anger and would have thrown the empty *tarasun* bowl at the fisherman, when Ostak said quietly.

"There is a net spread around your vessel. If you do evil here, *it* will come upon you. I see!"

Perturbed a little, Stolkei was staring at the wrinkled face of the blind man when

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both heard a scream from the river. Recognizing the voice of Aina, the fisherman felt his way out of the hut, followed by Stolkei.

Ostak clutched the arm of the other.

"What has happened to Aina? Where is she?"

What Stolkei saw was this: Beside the hole in the ice a small figure in furs was facing big Lak, a two-pronged spear fish in its hands. The Finn sprang at Aina and jumped back as the spear drove into his shoulder. Then he brushed the weapon aside, caught up the girl, wrapped a neck-cloth about her face and flung her over his shoulder.

They moved off along the shore toward the lugger. Fedor followed.

By the hole in the ice Stolkei saw that there remained only the dead fish, the spear and the foxskin cap that had fallen from the head of Aina.

"What has happened?" he repeated slowly. A cunning light came into his black eyes and he pulled at his beard. "Eh? Why, pray to the mercy of God, Ostak. The ice about the hole has cracked. Aina has fallen in."

"*Ai-a*," moaned the old man. "And the river is moving under the ice! Run to the hole, master. I can not see to go. Run swiftly!"

Stolkei put a hand over his mouth to keep from laughing. He started off at a lumbering trot.

"I go, uncle." Bethinking himself, he paused. "But, nay. The girl has gone under. The ice is moving in the bay, I tell you. Never will you see Aina again, old man."

It was true that here and there after the passage of the giant Finn with his burden, the white sheet over the bay revealed gray lines, wherein the black water soon appeared.

"Shame upon your head, old sinner," was the skipper's Parthian shot. "That you should make the girl go spear-fishing on breaking ice. Do not tell them of this in the village or they will set the dogs on you. *Tchai!*"

He hurried around the shore of the bay after the others. Ostak remained as if petrified. Then he began wringing his hands on his chest and moaning to himself. When this ceased he stood as if listening for a long time, his heavy shoulders hunched, his fingers closing and unclosing.

"Kam," he growled. "Kam. Did you see what happened on the ice?"

From under the floor planks of the hut crawled out a frightened Kam. He came to Ostak, whimpering. He told him what he had seen.

"Why did Aina cry out, Uncle Ostak?" he asked at the end. "Is she sick and are the lords taking her to their ship to make her well?"

But Ostak, seizing his hand, was making him hurry down toward the river. Near the fishing-hole the blind man halted and told Kam to go out and bring him the spear. When this was in his hand, Ostak felt of the points.

Then he touched them again and held his finger to his nose.

"Blood," he muttered. "It was even as Kam said."

"Then Aina is very sick?" the boy demanded.

"How is the ice between shore and the ship?" demanded Ostak harshly.

When the boy told him, he shook his head, muttering. Where the three men were having trouble to cross, Ostak and Kam could not go.

The blind man took a step toward the path leading to the village. Then, still shaking his head, he turned and went back, led by Kam, slowly to the hut.

"Aye, Kam," he was saying. "The sister of your flesh is very sick. She will not come back to us. Her *sunyesun* will leave her body this night. It will be so."

"Then we must take her dress of silk, to clothe her, Uncle Ostak, and we must kill one of the wolf dogs, asking pardon of it, so it can pull her sledge to the *kanun-kotan*——"

"Nay, we can not cross Father Yenesei when he is rising from his sleep. *Ai-a*, if only you were a boy full grown and could throw a spear!"

The boy began to weep.

There was no food that night for him or the dogs. Remembering the frozen salmon on the ice he went down and got them, but Ostak would not take his knife, nor kindle the fire.

"What do you see in the sky, Kam?" he asked, toward morning.

"The gate of the *kanun-kotan*, Uncle Ostak. It is the white gate only. There are no fires climbing up to the stars."

"Soon there will be," muttered the blind

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man. "But they are not fires. They are the souls of the cloud people, of the people of ancient times. They are dancing and making merry—some of them. The white lights are the *sunyesun* of children, or those unburied."

"Thus will we see the soul of Aina?"

"Aye, you will see it. The red lights are those who have died in violence. The blue are those enchanted. And the purple lights are the souls of those who wrought evil on the earth. They are dancing—aye, jumping up and down in pain, for it will be cold for them in the sky world between the stars and they will not see the face of the One-Being-on-High. They will be carried off in the net of the angry souls——"

He bent his head as if listening. Kam huddled closer to him.

"Father Yenesei is angry," murmured Ostak. "I hear it."

But Kam heard nothing. Certainly the boy and the blind man, in the hut two miles from the lugger, could not have heard the splash in the river or the startled oath of the one of the three sailors who was awake.

There was no other sound but the splash. Aina, stealing out of the hold where the others slept, saw the figure of the watcher on deck—Fedor—and sprang over the side of the lugger.

The feet of the girl did not meet ice. She pitched into the water that numbed her with its cold as if a hundred daggers had pierced her flesh. The daggers reached to her brain and her feeble swimming ceased.

Fedor watched for a while, then, reassured, he went below to empty the vodka bottle that his companions had left unfinished.

THE next day clouds hid the sun and the wind ceased entirely. During the darkness the moving ice cakes had vanished, leaving a mirror of clear black water on all sides of the lugger. Except along the banks where a fringe of ice blurred the reflection of the pines, the channel of the upper Yenesei was clear.

"The last of the ice can't rightly be gone yet," pointed out Stolkei. "Here, you dog of a Finn, help me up with the anchor, for we had best be out of here while the channel is clear."

The bearded face of the skipper was bruised and blood had dried in a gash under one eye. Lak had drawn a knife on him in the quarrel of the night before over the girl. The Finn's mouth was bruised and his shoulder stiff where Aina's spear had ripped the skin.

They worked at the rusted anchor chain by fits and starts. Over their shoulders they cast glances at the spot in the snow that was the hut of Ostak. Through his telescope, as they drifted down the river, Stolkei could see the fisherman busied about his skiff on the shore.

"You see he does not think of us," he pointed out to Lak. "I tell you I planted a few words in his ear. He thinks he is to blame for—for the girl. He will hold his tongue, I tell you."

Lak did not look at the skipper. Fedor, kicked out of a drunken slumber, remembered what he had seen in the night.

"Aye, chums," he grinned, "the wench is frozen solid by now under our keel. She went down like a plummet—splash, like that! The ice was gone when she jumped."

"A true word." Stolkei heartened himself. "And look—the ice is out of the bay. A good thing for us, because some dog of a Buriat would have found the spear and the blood stains, maybe. It's all wiped out, now; the girl's dead. Come now, Lak, you ain't afraid of a blind man who doesn't even think you killed his girl?"

Lak's thick lips twisted.

"Fedor—he did it. She got loose from him."

The thin Russian moved uneasily and spat.

"Well, wasn't it Papa Stolkei who spoke first and tried to buy her?"

With a laugh Stolkei turned to the tiller, ordering them to bend the sails.

"We'll be under way before the —— can spit in ——. The channel's clear. I've loaded the muskets—not that we'll need them. If Lak wants to dream of water spooks, let him, I say."

Still they made little progress that day for the sails flapped against the mast, and the rudder of patched-up wood—the lugger's rudder had been damaged by the ice—swung in its chains idly. When they dropped anchor that evening they were a bare two miles downstream, abreast the bay where the black square of Ostak's hut loomed, a few cables' lengths away.

Even the current of the river seemed to have lost its force. The pine tops rose immovably against the sunset, and there was not a whisper of wind anywhere.

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All these things little Kam reported faithfully to Ostak. The blind fisherman knew well the meaning of the signs. Up the river the outgoing ice had jammed, holding back the floes behind it.

The water, rushing down from the freshets fed by melting snow, was heading up against the packed ice. During the hours of quiet on the lower river the ice was gathering above.

Soon, with the wind or a twist of the pent-up current, the jam would be broken and tons of ice, rushing behind a solid wall of water, would sweep down the breast of Father Yenesei. Not until then would the Winter garment of Father Yenesei be thrown off, and the upper river be safe for vessels.

That was why the lugger was still the only craft to be seen, even by the sharp eyes of Kam. The skiffs of the fishermen, the sloops of the traders, all awaited the passing of the ice jam, drawn up on the banks, or anchored well into safe bays.

So near was the lugger that the creaking of the yards or rattle of the rudder-chains could be heard on shore, mingled with a snatch of song or laugh as the men drank vodka before sleep.

Kam thought he recognized one of the songs. He remembered the words:

> *Hai, hai,* Aina lass——
> Don't get wild, my child.

The keen ears of Ostak heard the song, where he worked with fat and tallow, greasing the bottom of his ramshackle skiff and the wooden oar-locks. He worked the harder, for the darkness was no hindrance to him, and his wasted sinews swelled strongly under the toil.

Lak only did not sleep on the lugger. He snarled at Stolkei's voice that sang the song. When the two others were snoring in the hold he paced the narrow space between them, listening to the night sounds on the water.

Once he thought he heard the dip of oars, but the sound did not come again. Again, when the creaking of the yards ceased, he fancied that another creaking went on, down by the water at the stern.

Lak listened for a long time and was sure of a tapping, a straining, and gnawing somewhere outside the ship. Then came a loud creak. A Finn is deeply superstitious and Lak crossed himself before going on deck to look around.

But the lugger's deck was deserted. The gray sheet of water was undisturbed about the ship. Only the man's heavy footfall sounded. Uneasy at a curious murmur from the river, Lak went down to the hold again where his companions lay. So he did not see the dark shape of a skiff move out from under the shadow of the lugger's stern.

He was nodding, seated on his bunk, staring at a lantern, when the murmur about the vessel's sides became a ripple. The shadows in the hold moved up and down. The yards knocked against the mast.

In an instant Lak was up, head and shoulders out of the hatch. Wind struck his cheek. He could see the outlines of the banks under the gray lantern of dawn.

Lak jumped up and kicked Fedor. He grasped the shoulder of Stolkei.

"Wind," he yelled. "The river is rising!"

With a grunt Fedor turned over in his bunk. But Stolkei stumbled erect, and climbed on deck.

The two stared at the moving tops of the pines, and the ripples where the current eddied down the river. The eddies wavered back and forth curiously. Early daylight showed isolated cakes of ice wandering here and there.

"It is bad," said Lak. "There is something coming upon the river."

Stolkei nodded and the two fell to work at the anchor. Suddenly they looked at each other. Upstream, beyond the bend in the river there grew a murmur that rose to a roar.

"Ice!" yelled Stolkei. "An ice jam has broken." He glanced about swiftly. "We can make the bay here."

Lak was already at the sail ropes, and the skipper jumped to the tiller swearing thankfully because there was wind. A short run to larboard——

The lugger began to move down the river. Stolkei put over the helm. The vessel did not change its course. They were passing the bay.

Behind them a white line appeared around the bend. They could hear the crackling roar of grinding ice. Stolkei worked at the tiller frantically. But the lugger only turned slowly as it gathered speed. It was now drifting before the wind, stern first.

"You fool!" roared the Finn. "What are you doing?"

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"She won't mind the helm. The rudder——"

Stolkei swung around to stare with distended eyes over the stern. Lak wrested the tiller from his grip. The two men struggled for it, snarling and maddened by fear. The movements of the tiller served in no way to check the course of the lugger downstream, faster each moment as the wall of water, surmounted by the ice field, drew nearer.

A segment of ice struck the quarter. The lugger was swinging violently, as the flood struck it. Lak had knocked Stolkei down and when the white flood came over the stern, the Russian was carried overside, struggling to hold his feet. Lak was torn from the tiller and swept against a mast.

He clung there, gripping the wood with his great arms. He saw the ice pack grinding against the sides of the ship. The foremast went down, and with it the yard above Lak. Enveloped by the sail, the Finn fought against it, only to feel himself carried off on a block of ice.

For a moment he clung to the edge of the cake, numbed. Then the circling block struck another, catching the body of the man in the impact, the arms of the Finn went up and blood rushed from his mouth.

Out of the hatch the head of Fedor was stuck, and his screams reached the shore before the lugger, filling rapidly now, settled down under the breast of Father Yenesei.

As much of this as he could see Kam related to Ostak where the two stood on the hillside above the reach of the flood.

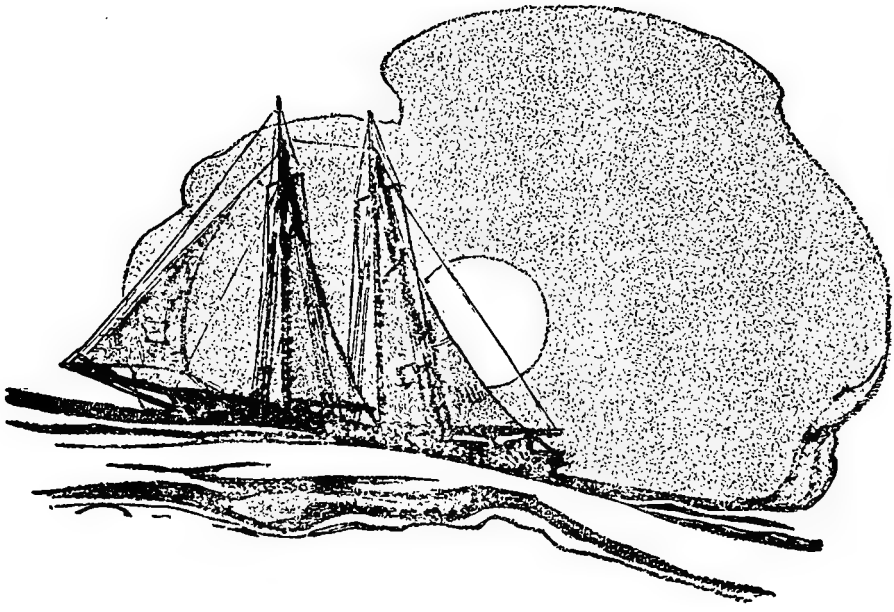
"Why did not the ship come into the bay, Uncle Ostak?" the boy asked. "Was it caught in a net from the sky?"

"Aye," said Ostak, "it was caught."

So Kam watched that night when the merry dancers came out and the flames rose into the northern sky. He noticed particularly that the purple lights were very bright and he fancied that the three lords from the ship must be dancing very hard to keep out the cold on their long journey without horses or dogs in the *kanun-kotan*.

When he went into the hut, he found that Ostak had added another thing to the ornaments of the hut. There was a rudder, patched up with bits of wood, from a ship, standing by the spear and the walrus head. Kam played with it until he was too sleepy to play any more.

It was not until years later when Ostak had departed to the sky world and Kam was a boy full-grown and master of the hut that he thought to look at the marks on the rudder, the marks of a knife, where by great labor the rudder had been severed from the rudder-post.



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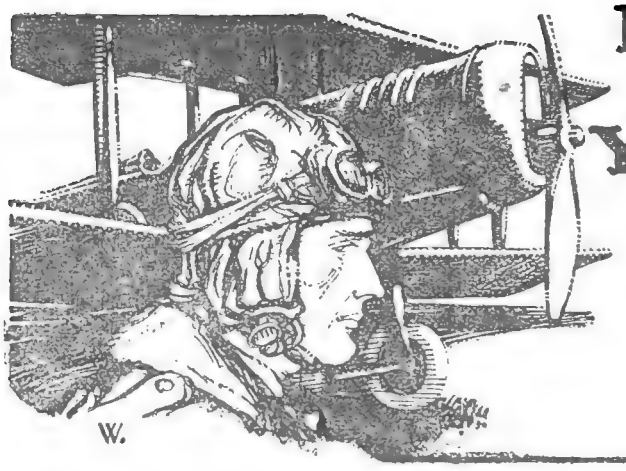

EXPLAIN IT YOURSELF

by Thomson Burtis

Author of "Feud's End," "The Jump-Back," etc.

DON GOODHUE, one of the prominent young men of the Army Air Service, possessed the gift of speech. His stock of metaphor plus a continual cutting and slashing of conventional phrases of the English language made him one of the men to whom it is a pleasure to listen. He also knew Craig better than anybody else. Consequently his remark about Craig—the only one of a personal nature anybody ever heard him make after Craig's short but sensational career at Langham Field had ended—should have some weight after it is stripped of Goodhue's facetious manner of expressing himself.

"If I live to see the time when I'm diddling my grandchildren on my rheumaticky knees and thanking —— that my last two teeth still meet, I'll always think of Craig as the most outstanding character I ever knew," Don said one time during the endless discussions of the man which followed his disappearance from Langham Field.

The night Goodhue first met Craig found the young flyer in a blue frame of mind. It was two months after the veterans of the border patrol had been transplanted from the Rio Grande to Chesapeake Bay for the purpose of satisfying the world of their ability to hit a battleship with a bomb and create sundry deleterious effects therewith. And that particular day had been a bad one. Dumpy Scarth, Goodhue's roommate, had been killed in a collision over a bombing target. The lovable, irrepressible, brilliant Scarth was missed by the gloom-shrouded field, and perhaps Goodhue missed him most because of the close personal relationship there had been between them since arriving at Langham on temporary duty.

It was an hour after supper, and Don was pacing the room with long strides, waving a cigaret-holder six inches long to emphasize his remarks. Dick Alden was sitting on the bed, listening, mostly.

"I'm so low I'd have to stand on a step-ladder to kick a duck in the stomach," stated Goodhue. "I feel as though I was sliding down the balustrade of life into the ash-can of eternity."

Big, red-headed Alden grinned. From down the hall of the bachelor officers' quarters came fiery Pop Cravath's voice in querulous protest over something.

"Goody, you're the only man in the world who looks natural with a cigaret-holder," Alden remarked.

"I'm glad I look natural because I feel —— unnatural," returned Goodhue, tapping out a new cigaret.

He was a little above medium height, slender, and parted his brown hair in the middle. He was a boyish-looking chap, with sparkling dark eyes and a mouth that indicated an ever present sense of humor.

"Pardon, but which of you is Goodhue?"

A tall man was standing in the doorway, and as he spoke his eyes went from Alden to Goodhue questioningly. The first impression the two men got was of their visitor's

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height and slimness, and of a somewhat pale, cameo-like face.

"I'm Goodhue."

"My name is Craig. Captain Hill told me that I was to occupy Lieutenant Scarth's quarters."

The stranger came into the room to shake hands, carrying an expensive looking leather bag. Goodhue introduced him to Alden, inspecting his new roommate with growing interest.

The newcomer, at first glance, seemed unusually handsome. Closer inspection, however, revealed a certain peculiarity which detracted subtly from the impression given by the wonderfully clear-cut features and black hair. Craig's whole face looked as though it had been too carefully chiseled by a sculptor—the thin lips were almost geometrical in their lines, and even the eyes seemed to have been carefully placed in clean-cut depressions. There was not a line of softness in that face—it was as cleanly lined and hard as a well-cut diamond. The face which truly gives an impression of beauty must have an underlying spirit, personality—an elusive quality which Craig's countenance did not reflect in the slightest. His face was a good-looking mask, from which two non-committal dark eyes looked forth without a trace of expression.

"Your bunk is here," said Goodhue, leading the way into the inner room which divided his quarters from the bathroom. "Shake your grip and come out and sit down."

"Thanks. I'll run down and tell the men where to bring my baggage."

As he walked out both flyers noted the perfection of his uniform. Not a wrinkle spoiled it—breeches, boots and blouse looked as though their slim owner had been poured into them.

"I wonder where he came from—I never remember hearing about any Craig in the Air Service recently," said Alden.

"Search me. Looks like a cross between a tailor's dummy and a wax clothes-horse in a store window."

"Did you notice his grip?" inquired Alden, stretching his big body back on the bed.

"Couldn't look better if he was starting on a honeymoon," nodded Goodhue.

"No, stupid, his handshake. His fingers felt like so much mobile steel to me."

The heavy tread of several men approached down the hall. In a moment three husky civilians staggered in with a huge wardrobe trunk and a foot-locker. Later they left a big packing-case in the hall.

"That's all," came Craig's cool voice.

"Excuse me—I'll unpack," he said as he entered the room. Without further speech he entered his own room, shut the door, and apparently went to work, for the two other pilots heard occasional footsteps.

"Nice, sociable gazabo," remarked Goodhue with an airy flourish of his ornate cigaret-holder.

"Let's go down the line and see whether anybody knows him," suggested Alden. "He's a new one on me."

Finally Shorty Cronin, fresh from Carlson Field in Florida, remembered him.

"I know the guy you mean," he said. "He's been holding down an abandoned field—Grimm Field or something like that—ever since the armistice. It's only a few miles from Carlson, but we never saw this egg at all unless we flew in to Grimm. When Grimm was dismantled they left a few hangar-fuls of supplies and I understand this bird Craig was assigned to stay there and look after it. Had a couple of ships to fly and about twenty men under him. Lived the life of Reilly, I guess, all by himself."

"It's funny you Carlson beauties wouldn't know him pretty well," remarked Goodhue. "Or isn't Grimm on the same social plane?"

"Apparently not—Carlson is too low for 'em to associate with," grinned Cronin. "I heard somebody down there say they sent dance invitations and all that stuff over to Craig and he never yet showed up on Carlson Field except on a couple of forced landings. Used to send a truck over after a spare part rather than fly over after it."

"Kind of a mysterious roommate I've drawn," commented Goodhue.

He had no reason to change his opinion during the next few days. Craig was assigned to the 114th Heavy Bombardment squadron, which was likewise Goodhue's organization, so the two were thrown in each other's company considerably. Craig talked pleasantly enough in his even voice, but there was an aura of cold reserve about him that even his roommate could not pierce.

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Never a word did he say concerning himself, his family, or his career in the Air Service. When a group of flyers gathered in the quarters and the talk drifted to flying, Craig never even hinted at any of the incidents in his own flying career. He would comment naturally enough on any impersonal matter, when spoken to directly, but never illustrated his brief conversational efforts with personal experiences.

"He uses the word 'I' less in a month than any of us do in a day," Goodhue remarked a few days after Craig's arrival. "You barracks flyers graze roofs and spin into the ground here nightly without getting any dope from him at all. And I've got a thoughtlet—not fully sprouted yet—that Craig's seen a little in his time."

Goodhue was not alone in this opinion. There were many straws to show which way the wind blew. There was the night, for instance, when Dick Alden mentioned Mademoiselle Paulette Le Von, who had been an Air Service favorite in a certain Parisian café.

"Small, blonde girl with a wonderful pair of gray eyes—lived in a little hotel on Rue Clemont Marot?"

"That's the girl," Alden replied, sudden interest in his eyes. "What outfit did you belong to over there?"

"I never got over—didn't get my commission until a month before the armistice," said Craig. "Well, if you'll excuse me I'll read a bit and go to bed."

Which he proceeded to do leisurely, leaving Alden with considerable curiosity surging in his bosom. Day by day other pilots joined the society which Goodhue named "The Association of Craig-Investigators," for the tall flyer's out-of-the-ordinary personality grew on every one with whom he came in contact.

The blank which he filled out at the 114th headed "Personnel Card" was a curiosity in itself. Goodhue was with him when he wrote in the blanks.

Person to be notified in case of accident—none. In case of accidents, my personal possessions will be shipped to—nowhere. Religious preference—none.

Goodhue repeated to himself—

"Now there's a remarkable document."

It was a little later in the day that he happened to wander back to the quarters in the middle of the afternoon. It was a slow day in the 114th—no bombing practise, and Goodhue's ship was in prime shape, so he had nothing on his mind. As he approached the quarters he heard a flood of music through the opened windows.

It was the piano in the hall, being played by a master. Ragtime that made every muscle quiver merged into some thundering symphony which seemed to reflect the turmoil of thousands. Then a lilting air played with a touch as light and sure as the melody itself, and as graceful.

Goodhue entered to find doors open all up and down the hall, and perfect quiet reigning. Before the piano was Craig, sitting carelessly with crossed legs, smoking a cigaret, and playing as though inspired. It was a perfect illustration of his peculiar position among his fellows that not one of them came out of the rooms where they were lounging to stand around the piano.

Before a week had passed, he was respected by every one, and yet the constant succession of minor events which happened seemed to place him farther and farther apart from his fellow pilots. His commanding officers felt the influence of the man as well as the younger flyers. He speedily proved himself a capable pilot on Martin bombers, and quietly took his place in the machinery of Langham Field. And yet, somehow, he was not of it. He seemed incapable of joining the light-hearted horseplay and constant razzing of each other which go on wherever airmen gather for even a moment. He acted as though he lived in another world, sufficient unto himself.

"You should have seen my statuesque roommate take a fall out of 'Lamb' Jackson today," Goodhue told the gang one night down in Alden's room. "Craig was assigned as officer in charge of the field, you know. Well, little Major Lamb was suffering with his usual St. Vitus Dance attack when that big formation of De Havilands took off for bombing practice, and he was running Craig ragged. Craig did everything Lamb told him to with that bored, don't-give-much-of-a —— air, and finally he got Lamb's goat frisking around a mile from its home pasture.

"Lamb stood him at attention and crawled up one side of him and down the other. He talked for five minutes, and then stopped, out of breath. Craig just stood there and said nothing. Jackson

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started again, stopped, and Craig just looked at him and kept his mouth shut.

"Then Lamb got his dandruff up—he didn't know how to get away from Craig, who never took his eyes off him. Lamb commenced raving wild as ——, then began to stammer and hem and haw, and finally went into a complete tailspin. He beat it as red as a beet, and left Craig monarch of all he surveyed. And he hadn't said a word."

"That's the boy all over," drawled Tex MacDowell. "Did any of you *hombres* notice last evening that when Larry Hinkley talked about that funny port in South America somewhere that Craig asked him whether he'd ever been in some black-and-tan saloon down there?"

"I did," stated Goodhue. "And there are a lot of other things he's dropped in passing, too. He gets my goat sometimes—joins a conversation, never says a word about himself, and goes just far enough to make me wonder like —— just who and what he is and has been, and if so, why."

"He's been around, and ——"

Suddenly a crashing chord from the piano made the conversation cease abruptly. It was the second time Craig had played. But tonight there was something in the music which, even to that gathering of devil-may-care young airmen, seemed to breathe revolt, savagry. It was as if the pianist were trying to tear some enemy apart in music.

When it had ceased Goodhue went down to his room. He found Craig sitting motionless in an armchair, a bottle of Scotch whisky, half empty, beside him. His face was paler than usual, and the finely chisled lines from thin nostrils to the corner of his mouth were deeper. He looked up, and just the ghost of a smile touched his lips. And yet, so rare was even that tiny indication, it seemed to Goodhue as though Craig's whole personality had changed—that he had penetrated a little way below the outer armor which had always kept him at bay.

"I am engaged in getting drunk," Craig informed the younger man calmly. "Will you join me?"

"Thanks, I will," grinned Goodhue.

Until three o'clock in the morning they sat there together. They talked of varied matters, and as they conversed, Craig threw out snatches of information about many places, from Port Said to Vladivostok, and commented with a cynicism as profound as it was utterly a part of him about many things. But never did he give an inkling as to what he had been doing in those nooks of the world, or what his experiences had been.

Goodhue, a boyish chap of twenty-five whose life before entering the Air Service had been the usual uneventful round of small city, prep school and college, listened with constantly growing interest. He glimpsed in Craig's words, the man himself, a world of which he knew nothing. And he thought he saw dimly some of the forces which had gone into the making of the most puzzling and yet most interesting man he had ever known.

Apparently the huge amount of liquor Craig was drinking had no effect on him. His face grew a little more pale, but his tongue never grew thick and his slim, long-fingered hands were as steady as ever. At intervals there would be lulls in the conversation, and twice Goodhue, under cover of lighting a cigaret, watched Craig closely, and wondered about the reason for what he saw. For Craig, both times, seemed immersed for the moment in his thoughts. He sat like a statue, one hand around his glass and the other clenched in his lap.

The first time Goodhue saw the prints of finger-nails showing livid against the flesh when the hand unclenched—the second time the glass broke into pieces in Craig's hand. It was as though he were suffering physical pain, and only showing it through the cruel contraction of his hands. During those moments without any noticeable change in face or eyes, Craig nevertheless seemed to radiate anguish. It was like watching a man go through mental torture, and glimpsing his suffering.

Goodhue had a half-hope that perhaps their long conversation would be an entering wedge for him, but Craig next morning was as cool and inaccessible as ever. Perhaps that hint of a smile which seemed to transform his face from a mask to the reflection of a personality came a little oftener, but there was not the slightest disposition on the tall pilot's part to make a friend of any man at Langham Field.

The evening before the night-bombing tests Goodhue declared himself to Alden.

"I'd like to crawl under my mysterious roommate's shell for a couple of reasons,

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Dick. I'd like to poke around in his mind and find out what the bug is, and furthermore, I like him!"

Many times that evening, as various flyers wandered in and out of Alden's room, Don made his stand for Craig against the crowd, for most of them were not enthusiastic about him. Goodhue defended and explained and got almost mad enough to fight that night, and could not have explained why. Certainly Craig had done nothing to make his roommate his friend, and yet the young flyer was his champion.

Twenty-four hours later he was to prove it by actions instead of words.

The next day was an idle one, except for lining up the ships for the evening's bombing. An old battle-ship was anchored at the head of Chesapeake Bay, and spread fanwise around it were various mine-sweepers and sub-chasers carrying the hundreds of distinguished observers. A large number of congressmen, the heads of the Naval and Military establishments, representatives of every sizable country in the world—all were there to see whether the Air Service could back up their claim that they could sink a ship as readily by night as they had proved they could by day. General O'Malley, the dynamic chief who was personally commanding the brigade, was out on the field all day long to see that every ship was properly loaded.

The level stretch of Langham Field, bounded on one side by a mile-long row of corrugated-iron hangars, was used for nothing but taxying that day. In long lines the ships crawled slowly out, the big Martins and Capronis and Handley Pages seeming like some prehistoric beasts as they twisted and turned getting into line like living things. De Havilands with parachute flares were in the front row. Then came the Martin bombers with tear gas and sulfur and phosphorus bombs. Another line of Martins and Capronis carried six-hundred-pound bombs. General O'Malley planned to show that distinguished gathering up the bay just how badly out of luck a fleet would be trying to approach our shores under cover of night.

At nine o'clock that night the line in front of the hangars was massed with cars holding curious spectators. There was no moon, but huge landing searchlights on hangar edges lighted up the field. The flyers were on the line, sitting around and talking, for the attack was not to start until ten o'clock. Already a few mechanics were warming up ships, the exhaust pipes sending long streamers of fire through the gloom.

Craig came walking slowly toward the place where the men of the 114th were gathered. Goodhue had not seen him since morning.

"Welcome, stranger," he greeted Craig. "Flying tonight?"

Craig nodded, apparently unconscious of the fact that almost dead silence had fallen as he had come up. His khaki breeches and shirt, with well-polished puttees and shoes, gave the impression of meticulous cleanliness and care. All Craig's possessions were precisely the right thing—his clothes were perfection and even his hair-brushes seemed to announce that their owner had looked a long time before finding exactly what he wanted.

"My Martin is out of whack," Craig said, pausing a moment. "I'm to fly one of those D. H's with the parachute flares on."

"How are they working the flares—how many, I mean?" inquired Tex MacDowell.

"Three, I believe," returned Craig, "I'm last ship over, and I'm to drop regardless. That'll make three flares if the other two get theirs off all right."

He walked off again, his tall form outlined sharply in the glare of automobile headlights. He sat down and leaned against the wheel of an ambulance for a back-rest. He removed his big Stetson, lighted a cigaret, and thereafter scarcely moved until the call to warm up echoed up and down the line.

Goodhue was acting as a bombardier that night, flying with tall, ungainly Hub Chester. Chester, the holder of a world's record, was a conservative, reliable pilot with the reputation of always getting where he was going. He had made his record by flying thirteen hundred miles and back in two days, elapsed time, and twenty hours flying time.

Goodhue took his place beside him to help warm the motors. The electric bulb in the cockpit gave them plenty of light to read the instruments. Mechanics primed both motors, and then yelled—

"Clear!"

Both Libertys started without trouble when Chester clicked on the switches and pushed the starting buttons.

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All up and down the line motors were roaring until the noise was like Bedlam. The air was filled with shooting flame from the exhaust pipes and interwoven into the din were high-pitched shouts as mechanics and pilots yelled to each other to make themselves heard.

Chester and Goodhue were like men apart. With bent heads they studied tachometers, oil gages, air-pressure indicators, voltmeters, temperature instruments and all the other sign-boards of a motor. They seemed totally unconscious of the hurly-burly around them while they tested their motors. Their trained ears automatically caught the drum of their own motors and separated them from all the others which were roaring around them. They snapped switches off and on, tested the altitude adjustment lever, and inch by inch shoved the throttles forward as the temperature crept up.

It was nearly ten minutes before Chester was completely satisfied, but finally, when each Liberty ran wide open without a miss on either switch, and every needle in the maze of instruments ahead of him was standing stationary at the exact point where Chester liked to have them, he let the motors idle and deigned to take notice of his surroundings. He and Goodhue sat quietly in their cockpit, smoking cigarets and waiting for the word to start.

It came quickly. The first D. H. winked with its signal light once. In quick answer the green control light on a hangar roof glowed for a moment, and was gone. The De Haviland took off in a shower of sparks as the wide-open motor burned out excess oil and carbon from the long idling. In a moment the second D. H. gave its signal—two flashes. When two green lamps flashed out against the night that ship took off.

Chester and Goodhue were the second Martin off the ground. Their signal was a long light, and then a short flash. Chester reached over for the button, and gave the signal. There was a momentary delay, and then their signal was answered from the green lights.

Goodhue worked the throttles so that Chester could give his whole attention to the wheel.

He was big and strong, but he had to brace himself against the wheel as Don slowly shoved the throttles open. The huge bomber started slowly, but as Chester succeeded in getting the tail up it picked up speed rapidly, until they were rushing toward the gloom-shrouded edge of the field at sixty miles an hour.

They had used but half the field when it left the ground. Chester took off straight over the wires and was well out over the Bay before he turned. Both flyers, in the intervals between their constant searching of the sky for near-by ships, kept their eyes on the field, watching the take-offs. It was an eery sight. The impression of living monsters was increased, for the Martins were shadowed almost completely, and the flame of their exhausts as they took off seemed like fiery breath.

High above the circling Martins Goodhue could see the flying lights of the D. H.'s. They were now in a loose three-ship V. Craig was flying on the right-hand side, Don noted. Craig's ship had an unusually large tail-light which Goodhue had noticed on the ground.

After one circle of the field the five-ship formation with which Chester was to fly was in the air. Captain Lawton, with his flying lights, flashed the signal to get into formation, and one by one the Martins slid into place behind the young squadron commander. They flew two hundred feet apart. It was reasonably easy to keep track of the other ships, but there was little time for any pilot to devote to the beauty of the scene below.

They followed the De Havilands—visible only by their lights—straight up Chesapeake Bay. The water was like a sheet of silver below them, studded at intervals with small boat-lights. The shore was deserted for several miles inland, without a light to relieve the dead blackness. A missing motor meant a landing in the water.

The De Havilands had dropped their parachute flares as the Martins approached the fan-shaped mass of lights which represented the observing boats. Three balls of fire dropped downward toward the mass of shadow which represented the target. On the mine-sweepers and yachts Goodhue could see the decks covered with men. The lighted boats on the calm water looked like some tiny fairyland three thousand feet below.

Captain Lawton's lights winked off, and then on again. One by one the Martin pilots gave their ships the gun, and slid into single file behind their leader. Suddenly

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the first ball of fire exploded into a huge flame, swinging on a parachute. The other two followed, and as the three flares floated downward slowly the target was as visible as it would have been in daylight.

The captain did not hesitate. He started flying toward the target, into the wind. Goodhue loosened his belt, and calmly climbed over the cowling which separates the pilot's two-seated cockpit from the bombardier's seat, which is the extreme nose of the ship.

Goodhue dropped to his knees and put his eye to the bomb sight. Everything was all right—the air-speed lever, wind allowance and altitude adjustment had all been figured before leaving the field and the sight got into shape.

As they approached the target—they were immediately behind the lead ship—Goodhue watched his banking indicators closely and with one up-raised hand guided Chester. When they came close enough to see the target ahead through the bomb-sight Goodhue motioned to Chester until the lanky pilot, who could not see the target underneath at all, was flying a bee-line for it.

With his eye glued to the sight and hands on the releasing handles, Goodhue waited for the proper moment. He wondered what had happened to Lawton's ship—they had gone over without dropping any bombs. Probably they had hung on the racks. In a few seconds his sight was lined on the target, and he jerked the lever four times in rapid succession. Then he stood up and looked over the side to watch his shots.

At first it looked as though they were dropping straight down, always underneath the ship. As the four white projectiles got closer to the water, however, they looked as though they were rushing horizontally over it. They had the ninety miles an hour speed which they had got from the Martin, and the closer to the water they came the more obvious their forward speed was and the less discernible their speed downward.

The still air and Chester's perfect flying, plus Goodhue's accuracy with his sight, made it a beautiful shot. Three of the sulfur and phosphorus bombs hit the hulk below, and the ship was sheathed in a mass of living flame two hundred feet high. It was like some Gargantuan display of fireworks.

In a moment the parachute flares hit the water and went out, but down there the target was outlined in fire and phosphorescent brilliance. It was now at the mercy of a loaded ship.

More phosphorus bombs were dropped by the other ships, and then, on the second trip over, the tear-gas bombs went down. In ten minutes the first formation had dropped all its projectiles, and a second formation carrying demolition bombs was hovering two miles away, waiting for its turn. The small flying lights looked like high-flying fireflies—the ships themselves were invisible.

Captain Lawton collected his formation over the blazing target, and led them homeward. The three D. H.s had hovered over the target to watch the display for a while, but Craig was the only one left. The other two had started homeward. Goodhue knew whose D. H. it was on account of the over-size flying lights.

Half the trip home had been covered, and a stately formation of Handley Pages and Capronis had just passed them on their way up to the target, when Goodhue looked around casually to see where Craig was flying. There was no sign of the De Haviland anywhere.

Perhaps he had given it the full gun to get home fast, and was far ahead of the slower flying Martins, Don reflected, but there was no sign of a light ahead. He was riding back next to Chester, now, so he stood up and leaned forward to look over the side. If one looks over the side of a Martin from either of the pilots' seats, one of the propellers, which whirl around with their tips only a few inches from the pilot's head, is very liable to create considerable havoc with a man's anatomy.

Chester was watching his instruments like a hawk, for he knew what a forced landing would mean down there in the blackness. It meant the water, and various hours of wet and cold providing they got to shore safely. Both Libertys drummed along evenly, though, and Chester's constant examination of his instrument board and the additional gages on the side of each motor showed nothing wrong.

Goodhue was getting a bit worried about Craig. He searched the water below, but could see no signs of a plane in it. Then he drew back sharply, pushed up his goggles, leaned far over the side and watched.

There were Craig's flying lights—there could be no mistake about that, and his

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ship was spiraling down toward the water, from the path described by the light. Was there something wrong, or was he simply amusing himself?

There was something wrong. Through the darkness Goodhue could not tell what position the ship was in, but he did see it hit the water.

He flopped back to his seat and motioned Chester out of the formation. The pilot spun the wheel and with full rudder aiding him slipped to one side. Captain Lawton flashed the message to break formation as he saw Chester's Martin start downward.

Goodhue pulled both throttles back to idling while he yelled his scheme into Chester's ears. The imperturbable pilot nodded, and started the Martin on its downward way.

Meanwhile Don removed his puttees, shoes, shirt and breeches, leaving himself shivering in underwear while the big Martin rushed downward in huge circles at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. Don's straining eyes could not make out whether the ship was upside down or not. If it was, probably Craig was pinned underwater in the maze of wires, hanging upside down on his belt. He could not make out any phosphorescent path which a swimmer would make through the water—there was nothing but a shadowy mass resting down there in the bay, a half mile from shore.

Goodhue had been a swimmer all his life, and a good one. He did not know whether Craig, providing he was all right, could swim at all. If he could not, the ship would only last an hour or so before it sank, and there was no possible way to rush a boat to him in that length of time.

As they dropped to a thousand feet Goodhue climbed on top of the bomb compartment, and then inched his way back to the rear cockpit. The speed was terrific, and he had all he could do to hold on. He breathed a sigh of relief when he got to the rear cockpit and could rest for a moment The most precarious part of his journey was ahead, for there was nothing from the cockpit back to the tail that he could hold to.

He lay flat on his stomach, and crawled backward toward the rudders with his hands gripping the sides of the fuselage. At intervals he looked downward, but there was not a sign of Craig—simply that blurred mass on the water.

As he reached the horizontal stabilizer on the tail he grasped the vertical fin and then waited for Chester. The ship was scraping the water now, both Libertys wide open.

A hundred yards from Craig's ship Chester cut his motors. It was masterly flying that he did that night—stalling a Martin a few feet high and then catching it again before that three and a half ton ship falls a foot is no job for an amateur. Goodhue was crouched on the stabilizer, holding to the fin. Twenty-five yards from his goal he jumped off the Martin.

It was fifteen feet down to the water, and even the stalled ship represented sixty miles an hour. There was no opportunity to make a dive out of it—he hit the water half on his back, with stunning force.

For a moment he trod water, groggy and sick. Then he started for the ship with long, slow strokes.

"For the love of ——, who is that?" came Craig's voice.

He was sitting on the tail, which stuck up almost perpendicularly due to the submerged motor. Overhead the Martins circled ceaselessly, and the light of Chester's ship could be seen as he turned around to come back over, low, and find out how Goodhue was making it.

Craig, like Goodhue, was in his underwear. He hauled Goodhue up on the temporary life-buoy.

"I'm sure glad you're all right," puffed Goodhue, shivering at the exposure of his wet body to the cool night air. "I was afraid you couldn't swim, or else were tangled up some way."

"So that was it," said Craig slowly. "I was just getting ready to start for shore. Thanks for all your trouble."

"Don't mention it," grinned Goodhue "Let's start so they can see we're all right up there."

A growing roar close to them made both men turn around. Chester was speeding toward them. As the great Martin rushed past Goodhue stood up on his precarious perch and nodded rapidly. He hoped Chester could see him.

"Well, let's go," he said to Craig.

Craig nodded and stood up, hanging to the flapping rudder. Then he dived off, Goodhue following him. It was a good half mile to shore, but they swam it easily. Craig's long, lean body seemed to go through the water with the ease of an eel. The long streaks of phosphorus made their

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progress plainly visible to the men above. The whole Martin formation waited until they had made the shore. Two formations returning from the bombing thundered past, but did not stop. None of the ships could be seen—only the roaring motors and small lights showed where they were.

The two flyers waded the last hundred yards, and then sat on a narrow strip of sand to get their breath and watch the ships go home. It was only twenty miles from Langham, so the sub-chaser which was part of the field's equipment ought to get up after them within a couple of hours. Meanwhile it was mighty cold and uncomfortable.

"I sure wish we had a fire," remarked Goodhue. "It would be a good signal for the boat that comes after us, and likewise would keep us warm. If I live the next hour, I'll live forever."

"It won't be a very pleasant wait," agreed Craig, who was lying flat on his back on the thin strip of sand.

Back of them was what appeared to be a section of swamp and marsh.

"If you don't mind me inquiring, why did you do this crazy stunt?" asked Craig in his even voice.

"Oh, I'm just a pretty fair swimmer and I thought I might do you some good," returned Goodhue airily. "I didn't want to have two roommates bumped off on me in such rapid consecutiveness. Lord, I wish I had a cigaret!"

"Did you know who it was that was down?" persisted Craig.

"Uh huh. Your flying lights were bigger than any of the other D. H.'s," replied Goodhue. "So saying, our young hero arose and flapped his limbs to escape the coolness of the night air."

He jumped around on the sand, flogging himself with his arms. Craig lay quietly, his body seeming grotesquely tall and slender outlined against the sand. The water lapped softly on the beach, and up above a million stars looked down on the two all-but-naked flyers.

When Goodhue had started the circulation in his body going at such a rate that he was temporarily warm he sat down again close to Craig.

"I can't imagine why you did it, Goodhue," Craig said slowly.

It was as though he was trying to understand something entirely foreign to him—groping to find the explanation for it.

The friendly darkness hid the sudden flush which reddened Goodhue's face. He scarcely understood the reason for the warm satisfaction which filled him as he caught the note in Craig's unemotional voice.

"Don't turn up the massive brain too hard, Craig," he said lightly. "By the way, in return for the pleasure of my company for the next couple of hours I wish you'd answer me one inquiry which is none of my business but which I'd like to know."

"What is it?"

"How old are you? I've guessed everything from twenty-four to thirty, and still haven't got an idea."

"My official army age is thirty-one, now. My real age is thirty-six."

"Thanks. Will you jazz about with me up and down the beach? The zephyrs are penetrating my beeweewees again."

Craig arose and accompanied Goodhue in a brisk run up and down the beach. For the next two hours they alternately talked and exercised beside the placid, silver bay, and Goodhue had plumbed a little deeper, he thought, into Craig's personality than he ever had before.

A week later Goodhue was having the time of his life with one of the single-seaters he had wormed out of the pursuit-group for a jazz ride. He was a pursuit man by training, but not since leaving California two years before to go on border patrol with DeHavilands had he had an opportunity to fly a scout.

He had just finished a series of barrel rolls a few miles north of the field when he decided to fly the forty miles up Chesapeake Bay to where the target for bombing practise next day was located. It was the hulk of an old battle-ship which had been used for many bombing practises. Tomorrow the 114th was to bomb it again, but this time bombs weighing one thousand and two thousand pounds were to be used for the first time.

It was in preparation for the climax of the bombing tests—the attempt to sink the *Friesland*, which had been the most powerful, heavily protected ship in the German navy. The air brigade had sunk submarines, destroyers, cruisers, and proved that they could function a hundred miles at sea, or at night. All that remained was to prove that their great bombs could sink the most powerful battle-ship.

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Goodhue was curious to see what effect one of the mammoth projectiles would have on that hulk up there. He would swoop down to it and look it over closely. Then when he released one of those two-thousand-pounders on the morrow and saw it hit he would have a pretty accurate idea of just how much damage it had done.

The bay was wide, and there was no use in bothering his head about forced landings, so he skipped the little S. E. 5 along the top of the water and reveled in the feather-like way it handled. Occasionally he took a brief look at his instruments. The 180-horsepower motor functioned smoothly, and so comparatively quietly alongside the roar of two mighty Libertys, which Goodhue had grown accustomed to, that he luxuriated in the experience of flying.

As the ship sped like a bullet a few feet above the water Goodhue was thinking of Craig. For the last two days he had been fighting with himself about what he ought to do, and still could not come to a decision.

For Craig was a crooked card-player, and Goodhue himself had seen his roommate swindle his fellow-pilots.

It had happened in a blackjack game. Craig had asked to join the game—the first effort he had ever made to become a part of the life in the quarters.

The game had got to be very sizable, as is the way with Air Service gambling. Twenty-five dollars a hand was not uncommon. Goodhue himself had ten dollars on his hand, Tex MacDowell had twenty-five, Dick Alden twenty and little Shorty Cronin five. Craig was dealing.

Goodhue knew little about the methods of card cheating, but it just happened that, as Craig picked up the cards which had been used in the last deal, Goodhue noticed the five of spades. Craig put the used cards on the bottom of the deck, face up, as is the blackjack custom. After he had dealt the new hand his faced card was a six. Every man in the game indicated that his hand was near enough twenty-one to be satisfactory, and that they would not take another card.

The best Craig could have was sixteen, a hard hand to hit without the chances all in favor of being broken. Without hesitation he hit it—with the five of spades. He had a jack in the hole, making his hand a perfect twenty-one.

Subsequent hands showed Goodhue Craig's method. As he gathered the used cards of the last deal he managed to have a four, five, six, or seven, on the bottom. Then if he, as dealer, got a hard hand to hit like fourteen or fifteen, he would turn the deck over. The used cards being faced the opposite way from the unused portion of the deck, he could then deal himself off the top a card that would help him. The deck presented the same appearance either way, and Craig was very adept in turning the deck over unobtrusively. He would hold it on edge for a moment while apparently studying as to whether to hit himself or not, and few people would notice that, when he decided to deal himself a card, the deck did not lie the same way it had.

As he automatically handled his little ship Goodhue came to a decision. He would not expose Craig, but he would tell Craig himself what he knew. Why he should not publicly denounce him he did not know. Even since their experience together on Craig's forced landing the man had made no overtures of friendship, but was as inaccessible as ever. There had been a subtle change in his attitude—a warmness in his greeting or manner which had been absent before—but it had never reached the point where he made any advances whatsoever, or encouraged any.

Despite it all, there was a fascination about the man. It was partly because of his very individualism, probably. The contradictions in his character—his musical ability and undeniable culture, for instance, set over against the crookedness which would cause a man to swindle his own comrades. Goodhue thought he could sketch in a general way, now, his roommate's past history, and some of the reasons for his knowledge of the out-places of the world. But what had turned him into a life of crime, with his gifts? And what were the reasons for those occasional intervals of black melancholy, when he deliberately drank himself into a torpor?

Thoughts like these filled Don's head as he covered the last lap of his trip. He had reached his destination in considerably less than half an hour. Occasionally he darted by a fishing boat on his way, but the last few miles of the trip were deserted. When he reached the old hulk not a living thing but the sea gulls was in sight.

He swooped down for a good look at the old hulk which had been target for many

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a practise attack. The water was shallow, and the vessel was aground. It had been blown to pieces, practically, but due to its firm anchorage in the mud still maintained some appearance of having been a vessel of the American navy.

As he came close he could see the utter disintegration of it. Twisted metal, great holes blown clear through to the bottom—remnants of masts and gun turrets—all were topsyturvy. The one-time pride of the Navy was pathetic in its isolated ruin.

He was swooping by, only a few feet from the water and less than fifty yards from the side of the hulk when there came a warning sputter from the 180-horse-power motor. He barely had time to jazz the throttle when the roar of the motor died. Before he could realize what had caused it blue flame was playing over the cylinders. A broken gas-line was spraying gas over the hot metal.

With the last of his flying speed the pilot lifted the S. E. in a zoom, banking as he turned. He caught it in time, and with top-rudder side-slipped. The flame had disappeared before he hit the water.

His left wing crumpled and in a momentary flash it seemed as though the whole ship were disintegrating. Dimly he felt his left leg buckle under him, and then he was engulfed in the swirling water which closed over the tiny ship.

He fought as though in a dream. His fingers tore at the belt which held him in its grip. He was laboring for breath as he got loose, only to ram his head against the remnants of the left wing, which had crumpled against the cockpit. The crash in the comparatively shallow water stirred up such an amount of mud that opened eyes did no good—all he could do was tear and fight insanely to get loose.

Behind his closed eyelids he saw great shooting sparks, and the torture of his lungs was unbearable. The pain in his left leg and the hurt of his bleeding fingers were as nothing, during that deadly eternity when he fought the wood and linen octopus which seemed human in its efforts to hold him in its clutches.

He was more than half drowned when he came to the surface. By the mercy of the flyers' gods, assisted by his own quick thinking and accurate flying, he was only a few feet from the crumbling sides of the hulk. He could not have gone ten more feet, weighted down as he was by boots and heavy clothing. What had been the deck of the old battle-ship was now a heaped up mound of metal, awash in the placid waters of the bay.

He fought off the faintness that threatened to overcome him as he strove to clamber out of the water. For half an hour—most of it spent merely holding on when the pain became too great—he was unsuccessful. Then he realized that his bursting head and crippled leg would soon be too much for him.

With a last effort he lifted himself by his arms and dropped in a heap on the tangled mass of junk. He fainted then, and was totally unaware of the fact that his limp body rolled off and dropped a foot. His arms remained over the remains of a ladder, on the top. The rest of his body was almost hidden below the débris, resting on iron supports below the surface of the water.

Curious fish, swimming nonchalantly through the network of rusting metal, nibbled experimentally at his boots. Wheeling seagulls swooped low for a look. Miles away low sand-dunes showed dim across the water. The wounded flyer was an unconscious heap in the midst of far-stretching desolation. It was a life picture of perhaps the grimmest tragedy the men of the Air Service face.

At three-thirty, on Langham Field, the call went out. Goodhue had been gone two hours, with a gas supply of only an hour and a half, and nothing had been heard of him.

"All DeHavilands and S. E. 5s out at once to look for him. Martin pilots will taxi their ships into line for tomorrow's bombing practise, and then be on the alert to take their turn when the D. H.'s and scouts come back for gas," were the orders General O'Malley sent out. In fifteen minutes forty ships were in the air, flying low in ever widening circles like winged hounds on a scent.

Craig refused to allow any other pilot to take his S. E. 5 after he came back from his patrol. He merely smoked a cigaret while the scout was being gassed and oiled, and took off again. The country around Langham Field was almost half water—Chesapeake Bay, three sizable rivers and numberless tentacles of water reaching far back into the mainland. Swamp land and patches of towering trees more than half-covered the remaining terrane to the north

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and south, with the bay flanking the eastern edge for miles.

It was an hour after dark when the last ship landed. Fifteen of them had stayed out until the dusk was too thick to see, and the landing lights at the field were running full blast. Some of the ships had been forty miles at sea, and on land the circle had reached Richmond on the west, and the Potomac River to the north. Others had gone miles into North Carolina.

Craig himself had covered Chesapeake Bay, and most of the country within twenty miles of Langham Field.

As he strode into the mess-hall his oil-grimed face showed no trace of feeling, but he threw his helmet into the corner with such viciousness that the supposedly unbreakable goggles were smashed into smithereens.

"I'm afraid we'd have to be divers to find him," he remarked quietly in answer to an eager question.

Thereafter he did not join at all in the speculations about Goodhue's fate which most of the pilots indulged in.

The crack of dawn found the enlisted men of the field with a midnight breakfast under their belts and two hours of work accomplished. Every single-motored ship on the field took off, nor did they stop until noon except for gas and oil. Then they gave up. The Martin pilots had their practise attack with those tremendous bombs ahead of them, and the flyers of the other squadrons were ready to drop in their tracks. Every inch of ground within the section where Goodhue would have been flying had been covered, and it was a practical certainty that until the sea gave up its secrets Goodhue's exact fate would be unknown.

Craig, too, had lost hope. Yet somehow he could not remain quiet. He tried to, for a full two hours after dinner, and then gave it up. Finally he wandered aimlessly down toward the line. His ship was still laid up—pulling a motor and installing a new one this time—so he was not scheduled for the bombing that afternoon.

He stopped in at headquarters for a moment. As he was reading his official bulletins he happened to glance out of the window. For a few seconds he stared at the stout man in a battered felt hat who was alighting from an automobile—one of the Harton City taxicabs.

Then he slipped out the side door, and began to eat up the distance between headquarters and his own barracks with long strides.

For that man was John Folwell, most efficient of the operatives who work for a certain great detective bureau which protects hotels all over the country. And Folwell's presence meant that at last he had got the goods on the airman. There could be no other explanation for his appearance, for Craig knew he had been assigned on the case nearly a year before.

Craig was apparently cool as crystal as he slipped into his quarters and went swiftly to work. His plan was ready made—had been for months in the event that he had any warning whatever. It took him ten minutes to wrap a complete set of civilian clothes in a rain coat, with a wad of bills which he took from his bag. He took the risk of doing that because he was certain that Folwell would make no move until he had talked with General O'Malley, and the general had flown to Washington that morning. He would be back to watch the bombing practise, which meant an hour of grace.

He went down toward the pursuit group by the back way. He glanced at his watch as he started—fifty minutes until bombing practise would commence. That meant that the Martins would take off within the next quarter of an hour. As he walked swiftly down the little used back road next to the river he quickly adapted his long thought out plan to the exigencies of Langham Field. He would get a ship on the plea of watching the bombing, and then, after it was over, loaf back until the Martins were out of sight. As soon as that happened, he would land in the water a half-mile from shore. He could swim that far with ease, and batter the wings and fuselage with the fire extinguisher so that it would sink quickly. Then a change to civilian clothes—on land—destruction of his uniform, and a chance to get away.

The ships would go out to look for him as they had for Goodhue, and on the morrow he would be officially dead.

Everything happened as smoothly as he could wish. He got an S. E. from the pursuit group without trouble, and put his package in without any one noticing him. It was somewhat awkward to work the rudder, but he could manage it, and the floor of the cockpit was the only place in the small scout which would accommodate the package.

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He warmed the ship himself. It was the same one he had used in his hours of hunting after Goodhue. His thin lips twisted in a grim smile as he thought ahead to the hour when both roommates would have gone to the fantom squadron in the same manner. What a tidbit for the newspapers that would be!

He saw General O'Malley's De Haviland, with its one star on the side, being gassed and oiled. The general must have just got back from Washington, and be preparing to take off again. Probably he would not go to the office for more than a minute, and Folwell might not get a chance at him. Anyhow, their last chance to nab him was gone.

A last swift survey of the instrument board showed everything in readiness—oil sixty pounds, air pressure three, and the smooth-running motor turning eighteen hundred without a murmur.

"Pull the blocks!" he yelled, and the mechanics obediently jerked them from the wheels.

He turned on his throttle slowly, and the little ship answered the manipulation of throttle and stick by getting the tail off the ground instantly and taking the air within fifty yards. It was like handling a feather to fly the ship, and Craig felt the first real "kick" he had experienced in months at the thought of what was ahead of him. There would be none of those attacks of black melancholy and torturing restlessness in the next few weeks for him.

As he sped like a bullet out over the bay he took a last look back at Langham Field. The Martins were all warming up, lined up along the edge of the field. They would be taking off within a few minutes. There would never be another Martin taken off by him, Craig reflected.

As he loafed along on his way up to the target his thoughts were busy with memories of the crime for which Folwell had at last run him down. It was a queer quirk of fate that the only open-and-shut robbery with which he had ever been connected in any manner should have been unerringly laid at his door. Card cheating, crooked promoting, swindling of many kinds all over the continent and in many other parts of the world—all had been in his line for many years, but never yet had any one got the goods on him. And now the crime which had seemed so easy and safe, but which inevitably meant a long term in prison, had found him out.

He had entered the Air Service because he happened to be in America shortly after war was declared, and because he thought that flying might satisfy, at least temporarily, the restlessness and continual desire for excitement which had driven him all over the world. He had just completed the hard work of being a cadet and been a full-fledged flyer a few weeks when the armistice was signed.

He had stayed in the service for various reasons. He knew that he would never stay in the army permanently, but up to the time he had left Grimm Field the life had satisfied him, on the whole. He felt a vast contempt for most of the men of the flying corps—crude youngsters with little of life behind them and no idea of anything but their youthful delight in life as they knew it. All his life he had been a lone wolf, depending on nobody but himself and allowing no one to expect anything from him.

That robbery in Florida had been simply an accidental deviation from his accustomed criminal practices. It was his custom while at Grimm Field to take week-end cross-country trips to various resorts on the Florida coast. He usually managed to pick up some money gambling, and in addition there was the pleasure of the flying trip and a taste of the fleshpots.

Most often he went to Miami, and invariably stayed at the Gerstner Hotel. As an officer in the army he was well known by the management and guests, although there were not a half-dozen of them with whom he was personally acquainted.

Then came the opportunity. He was sitting in his room reading one Sunday afternoon when he heard the click of dice and low-pitched voices talking the vernacular of a crap game. He went to the locked connecting door and listened. It only took him a short time to identify the two participants in the game. One was the regular accupant of the suite next door—a middle-aged man named Becker who seemed to have plenty of money and was an inveterate gambler. He had been a guest at the hotel for a couple of months. The other man was a newcomer who appeared to be an old friend of Becker's.

The game was a big one, albeit very friendly. Craig heard them shooting as high as five hundred dollars. Apparently it was

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a cash game, likewise. They were rolling the dice on the floor.

He was just preparing to resume his reading when he heard the telephone bell ring and Becker answer it. It was for the other man.

"It's that real estate agent—I'll go down and sign those papers for him and be right back," Craig heard him tell Becker. "I won't be over twenty minutes."

"All right, I'll shave while you're gone," Becker replied.

The other man had gone out, and the suddenly interested Craig heard Becker go back to the bathroom. It was worth a chance. If he were caught it would be a very plausible explanation to say that he had simply made a mistake in the room, his being next door. He was certain that he was well known, by sight, to Becker.

There was no one in the hall as Craig quietly tried Becker's door. It was unlocked. The flyer stepped in boldly, for appearance sake, but very quietly. The money was on the floor. Becker could be heard singing raucously over the noise of running water. The bedroom was between bathroom and sitting-room, the door placed where the money was invisible on account of the partition between bedroom and sitting-room.

It was the work of a few seconds to pick up the money noiselessly and go out. It was a nerve-racking moment when he stepped out the door, but luck was with him. No one saw him.

Back in his own room he counted the money. There was something over six thousand dollars, mostly in hundred dollar bills. He stuffed it into the false bottom in his club-bag. That club-bag was a relic of his pre-army days, when its well-hidden compartment had been so useful as to be a necessity. Then he went down stairs, bought some cigarets and a newspaper in the lobby, said a few words to the clerk as he turned in his key, and then took a comfortable chair and read for three-quarters of an hour.

Everything had worked beautifully. Within a few hours the robbery was gossiped about all over Miami, and the Miami papers were full of it. Craig, as was his custom, checked out early Monday morning to fly back to Grimm Field. Before leaving, however, he interviewed the manager and with just the right amount of hesitancy identified himself and told him that as an army man he was compelled to be present for duty but that as the manager knew, his station was only a short distance away and that he would be available at any time to be questioned by the authorities.

The next three week-ends he spent at the same hotel. Folwell had been assigned on the case, and had questioned him exhaustively, without, however, gleaning any valuable information.

He had really begun to feel very comfortable, Craig reflected as his S. E. droned along rhythmically on its way up the bay. He had never deposited any of the money, but simply drew from it little by little as he needed it. Folwell must have had a long search to find out just who Edward Craig was, for most of his operations for the past few years had been far from the United States, and his trail had been covered well. He wondered what slip had caught him.

The old hulk came in sight, a shapeless mass apparently floating on the surface of the water. Craig's thoughts turned from things past to future events. Try as he would he could see no flaw in his plans. Folwell did not know that he had been seen by Craig, and would not suspect that his man was not dead. There was no chance that a ship would come over before he had a chance to sink his ship and get to land—he would wait until the bombing was over and the last ship out of sight.

The target was underneath him now, and Craig looked back idly to see whether the Martins were in sight. They were not. It would be an interesting show, at that—not a bad farewell to the Air Service to watch those thousand and two thousand pound bombs explode on that heap of metal.

For lack of anything better to do he swooped down low over the hulk to have a look at it at close range—the warped and twisted metal which had once been a proud battle-ship witnessed the resistless power of the great projectiles which had thrown those tons of iron and steel around like toothpicks. At intervals he watched his instruments for a few seconds—it would seriously disarrange his plans to have the motor go bad. He thought, with a brief smile, that no forced landing in his flying career would have been so disastrous as one today.

In a fast wing-turn he reversed the S. E. and roared past the target, only a few feet off the water. Suddenly his wandering gaze

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fixed itself on an object, invisible heretofore, which he could see through the crumbling sides of the wreck. He banked sharply and flew by again, as close as he dared. It was the body of a man, and undoubtedly Goodhue.

The irony of the situation flashed into his brain with paralyzing force. He could not go back to the field and tell them where Goodhue was. John Folwell was there.

He banked slowly, and crossed the target from above. Goodhue was invisible from there, he noted. His brain was busy trying to figure out some method of notifying the field without landing when he remembered what he had momentarily forgotten in the shock of his discovery.

In a few minutes fifteen tons of TNT would come hurtling out of the sky, bound for Goodhue's life-raft!

The clear-cut face was as bloodless as marble as Craig strained his eyes into the distance. There they were, coming up from the south. They were only ten miles away. In an instant a thousand varied emotions went through him, entangled with the picture of a slim white form dropping off the speeding Martin weeks before, and appearing at his feet in the darkness.

Instantaneously he found the only method which could possibly save Goodhue's life, providing he was alive. He must have been alive the day before to have hauled himself up on the wreck. It was a slim chance for either of their lives, but without conscious reasoning Craig did it.

He shoved the throttle wide open and flew a few hundred yards past the target, with the wind. Then he turned, and cut his throttle half-way. In a half stall he dropped toward the hulk. He planned to land alongside it, as closely as possible. His shot was accurate, for he was only ten feet high as he dropped downward and forward past what had been the stern. A foot above the water, opposite Goodhue's motionless body, he pulled the nose higher. As the ship dropped the left wheel, which was toward the ex-battleship, hit the water first. The S. E. was turned to the left, and with a crash the motor and propeller mushed through the water and into the hulk. Craig's head was reeling from a nasty bump when he had been thrown forward on the instrument board.

He took a grip on himself and by sheer effort of will cleared his head as the water surged up to his neck. He quickly unhooked his belt and clambered up on the fuselage, toward the upflung tail. He took time to get out a package which he had put in the ship the day before, in a compartment under the turtleback, to have in the event that he found Goodhue. It contained a quart of whisky, some now water-soaked sandwiches, and some bandages. He totally forgot the package which he had placed on the floor of the cockpit. He could not have gotten it, anyhow, for the little scout was going down. The crash had crumpled it so badly that it would not float at all.

Craig barely had time to climb aboard the ship before the S. E. went down. Eight miles away, three thousand feet high, fifteen Martins in three formations of five ships each, were roaring toward him like unbelievably horrible monsters. His mind could scarcely conceive of the power those squat-looking airplanes were even now preparing to use.

He took a moment to look down at Goodhue. He saw that he was breathing, although his eyes were closed and he lay motionless. He was half under water.

Craig's face was death-like in its paleness, and his eyes were terrible, but his hand was steady as he took the package out of his shirt-front and placed it carefully in the V formed by two upflung girders of metal. He stripped off his shirt and then balanced himself carefully on two slippery supports, awash in the water. He began waving the shirt slowly, although the ships were still far away.

The sinking of the S. E., due to the crash, took away almost his last chance to save Goodhue. That floating ship would have been an easily observable object to an alert bomber, although the chances were that in at least one of those ships some bomber with his eye glued to the sight and every faculty intent on one thing, would miss it. Now he was only a speck on that hulk. Even his uniform blended with the rusting metal.

With his eyes fixed to the oncoming Martins he thought with a bitter curse that he might have worked it far more wisely by taking a chance on the Martins seeing him in the air, and then waiting until the last minute to land in the water. But it was done now—he had acted without conscious thought under the shock of realizing what fate was in store for Goodhue.

The flyers had not seen him. With the

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fascination of the horrible he watched the formations break into a long line of ships, flying single file. It seemed as if the heavens themselves reverberated to the drone of thirty Liberty motors. He watched them get into the wind and the first ship come toward him. He could picture that tremendous bomb, hanging to its rack, and the observer's hand on the releases as he concentrated every faculty on his sight.

The next ten seconds would tell the tale. He waved the shirt without conscious volition. It seemed as though every power in his body was concentrated in his eyes, waiting for that huge projectile to drop. Not until the Martin was beyond the target did he shift his eyes to the second ship.

It required superhuman will-power for Craig to stand the strain. Every ship meant the same horrible chance taken over again. Ship after ship passed over without dropping, however, and Captain Lawton, in the lead ship, was diving his Martin recklessly on his way down.

When ten ships had passed over without dropping Craig gave a great, tearless sigh of relief and his legs gave way under him. He got back to his feet unsteadily as Captain Lawton roared by. The last three ships did not come over the target.

While the captain climbed to three thousand feet and collected his formation Craig succeeded in getting Goodhue's body up out of the water. It was a quarter of an hour before his eyelids quivered, and then opened.

Without a word Craig held his head and presented the opened bottle of Scotch to the lips of his roommate. What the world's record for one drink is may not be accurately known, but whatever it was, Goodhue broke it.

"For ——'s sake, what are you doing here?" Goodhue asked weakly, with a fair imitation of the old smile on his face.

"Just making a call," answered Craig with the first real smile Goodhue had ever seen curving his thin lips.

It was as if the man had changed completely.

"I—I need another drink," stated Goodhue in a slightly stronger voice as what he already had began to warm his blood.

"Eat some sandwich soup first," ordered Craig.

Goodhue wolfed down the water-soaked sandwiches without a word. While he did it Craig continued to knead and pound his body, bending and straightening arms and legs to stimulate circulation. The injured leg would not permit of very determined handling, but Goodhue stood the pain in his ankle long enough to let Craig massage it out of its swollen, half-paralyzed condition. A tight handkerchief bandage completed the emergency measures.

Apparently the decreasing drone of the home-bound Martins entered Goodhue's consciousness for the first time as he finished.

"What are all the ships doing there?" he asked, and suddenly stark fear came into his eyes as he remembered the scheduled bombing.

"Don't worry—they're going home," Craig told him hastily.

"Did they see——"

"You couldn't be seen from above. I flew over this desert island of yours yesterday and missed you, but I happened to be flying low today and saw you from the side. I landed to warn the Martins."

Goodhue said nothing for a moment. Craig turned his head quickly as he saw the sudden moisture in Don's eyes.

"Excuse my girlish hysterics," Goodhue remarked in a slightly unsteady voice. "I've been in the water so much lately I must have soaked too much up."

"In that case, it's time for another drink," suggested Craig.

They sat there, miles from land on their water-washed perch, and talked and drank. Craig seemed to have lost all his aloofness—it was as if he had suddenly realized that there were things in life which he had never known. He unbosomed himself for the first time in his life, without exaggeration or shame, and Goodhue listened as if in a dream. From the time when his supposedly wealthy father had shot himself and the news had come out shortly afterward that he was an embezzler, Craig had lived to prey on society. At sixteen he had been trained to steal, and at nineteen played poker for a living.

"There's a kink in me somewhere, perhaps inherited," he said finally as dusk was falling. "I have no conscience, and morality is a closed book to me. I can't say now that I am sorry for a thing I have ever done. It was natural for me to cheat in that game you mentioned. I had a spark of crookedness in me, and the years have made crime second nature."

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"Good God, after what you just did they can't put you in jail, Ed! Why, I'll——"

"Let's drink to that," interrupted Craig. "But they will, because you're not going to say a word about my landing on purpose. It would mean publicity all over the country, and when I got out in a few years I'd be ruined for the rest of my life by being prominent. That's all I'm asking you to do—keep still about what I told you. What you say starts when your eyes opened. Folwell'll be on that boat when it comes, I'm sure."

"You mean you'd be too well known to work your schemes after you get out of jail?"

Craig nodded.

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks," he said. "But I'm going to stick to my own game, and not mix in any more robberies. Let's drink to that, too."

Probably no one who ever knew Craig, either before or after his arrest, found it easy to believe John Folwell or Major Manning or the four enlisted men who were on the sea-sled which went after the stranded flyers, when they described what they saw. Folwell had been telling Major Manning how, after months of investigation, they had believed Craig the logical culprit. Clever watching had revealed nothing until Craig spent a certain hundred dollar bill, the number of which was known.

As the sea-sled approached its goal, blazing a moon-silvered path through the water, the occupants saw a peaceful scene in which the shadowed tangle of wreckage was blurred into beauty. Atop it were two figures, like huge night birds on a limb, who were sending plaintive melody across the whispering waters of Chesapeake Bay.

ONCE A POPULAR DANCE

by **H. P.**

IN THESE days of many dances, often named after animals, the originator of a new dance can expect his offering to retain popularity for a brief season only. When a young Paiute Indian, known to the whites as Jack Wilson, Indian name, Wovoka, fell sick in 1888 he utilized the delirium accompanying his fever to build up The Ghost Dance, which was to be the vogue for three years and end with the killing of Sitting Bull and the fight at Wounded Knee in December 1900.

Wilson lived in Nevada. When he recovered from his illness, and informed his friends he had been taken to the spirit world to receive instructions from the Indians' great spirit, he was regularly accepted as a medicine man of the biggest caliber.

A messiah was coming to restore the Indians to the old order of things, as existed before the coming of the white race. Wilson was accepted as a true prophet and his directions as to songs and the Ghost Dance were followed implicitly. It was by similar revelations that Pontiac formed his conspiracy; that Tecumseh, working through his brother Tenskwatawa, the Prophet, organized a red alliance.

Wilson's prophecy was big medicine. Not only were all living Indians to be restored to the lost privileges of the race, but the departed braves and their wives and children were to return and enjoy the new earth. The Ghost Dance was performed by women and men, holding hands and moving in a circle, faces to center, singing the songs Wilson taught them. Hypnotism entered into the ceremony.

The dance spread to the east and was eagerly accepted by the Sioux tribes. The 1890-91 outbreak, the killing of Sitting Bull and the Wounded Knee affair, are matters of history. Then like the Bunny Hug and other modern figures with zoological terminology the dance lost out.

Wilson was alive at least as late as 1905, but a figure of no importance among his people. (See Mooney's "Ghost Dance Religion," 14th Rep. B. A. E. pt. ii.)

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A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

WERE the early races of America of Chinese origin? Do they show Chinese influence? My own opinion is not sufficiently grounded in knowledge to have any weight, but somehow I can't accept what I believe is the latest dictum of the scientists to the effect that no racial connection can be shown between early America and Asia. Anyhow, it's an interesting subject for speculation.

The following is from Edward Perry, a recognized authority on Latin American affairs, having back of him years of distinguished service in the countries south of us:

Ampere, New Jersey.

You published in the issue of February 10, a letter in which is a comment that recalls talks I had with Tam Pui Shum, when he was Minister of China at Mexico.

HE TOLD me that he found in use in Mexico and in Guatemala, as well as in El Salvador, if memory serves me rightly, words that were the same in sound and in meaning there and in China.

He agreed with Vining's view, given in his "Inglorious Columbus," of the word *li*, as meaning river, water and a measure of distance, especially at sea; also that its use in names of a number of places in Central America, and in many Aztec words, may fairly be accepted as evidence of Chinese influence in America.

In southern Honduras and northern Nicaragua *li* is the final syllable of the names of a number of streams, as Comalí, Danlí, Moroselí, Namalí, Yaulí and others.

A NUMBER of migrations from Asia to America are suggested if not established by Homes in his "Aboriginal American Antiquities." Human portraits carved on monoliths in Central America seem distinctly Mongolian, and men who were well acquainted with Chinese in the Pacific States of our country declared that, "If they were dressed alike and mixed in a gang, none could tell which was

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Chino and which Poya!" The Poyas are Indians of northwestern Honduras.

A small statuette of terra-cotta said to picture with minute exactness the costume and features of Chinese mandarins, was found lying on bedrock where a cut for a railroad in Guatemala was being dug.

Over the image had lain 24 feet of boulders and gravel, two feet of loam and mold upon which grew great Spanish cedars and other trees.

Such bits of evidence may not be proof; but they have interest, and may help students who seek to determine the origin or the character of the inherited tendencies, characteristics, traditions and customs, that form parts of the problems that leaders of the various peoples, of Hispanic America particularly, have to meet.— E. PERRY.

YOU'LL remember that at an earlier Camp-Fire Mr. Verrill stated of the San Blas nations that "many of their customs and habits, as well as their language, are of unquestionable Mongolian origin" and that Professor J. Alden Mason, Assistant Curator of Mexican and South American Archeology at the Field Museum, Chicago, at a later Camp-Fire took definite issue with Mr. Verrill on this point, denying any Mongolian habits and customs among American aborigines, with the possible exception of the great Athabascan group of languages of northern Canada.

And now another comrade comes to the support of Mr. Verrill:

Los Angeles, Calif.

I wonder what Mr. J. Alden Mason would say if he overheard a *Hualpai Squaw talking with a Chinaman?* It might change his mind.

I can, if he likes, introduce him to both parties.

A friend of mine asserts it as a fact that—somewhere along the border—a Mongolian showed up who could not be understood by local Chinese, but who could talk with an Apache.

If I were going to bet, it would be upon Mr. Verrill's absolute correctness. There is an undoubted connection between our American Indians and the Mongolians.—F. C. SMITH.

SOMETHING from L. Patrick Greene in connection with his story in this issue.

As I think you know, he is now on our magazine's editorial staff. The other day, when reading manuscript, he picked up a story submitted for publication that made his eyes stick out. It was plagiarized from one of his own that had been published in *Adventure!* Talk about nerve—and coincidence!

They're not always easy to catch, these plagiarists, and three or four times in our eleven years we've been "stung." But we do catch 'em—caught two others besides the above during the same week. And quite often a story is returned to the sender without comment from us when we're pretty well satisfied it is at least partly a plagiarism but can't make our case final enough to slam it right down on the board.

Cliff Island, Maine.

The story was suggested by the enclosed clipping which was forwarded to me by Charles Brown, Jr., of Ask Adventure.

And here's another point which might be of interest: A brother of mine was mentioned several times in dispatches—he saw service in the Palestine and Mesopotamia campaigns—and, when I heard of it I naturally wrote asking him for particulars. He replied thusly: "General —— lost his ring. I took out my scouts and found it. I was mentioned once for that; don't know what I did the other times, and as for being 'Mentioned in dispatches,' a packet of cigarets would have been more appreciated."

Some day I'm going to get brother Frank's real story, for I can't help thinking that there's a story behind *his* story.—L. PATRICK GREENE.

Here is the clipping:

Congo natives on the African equator revolted, burned trading-posts, killed white men and cattle. A witch-doctor had sold them a charm, warranted to make them invisible and invulnerable to bullets.

White soldiers helped the witch-doctor, when, to quiet the natives, they fired in the air, not wanting to kill them. Hearing the guns fired and not being hurt, the savages concluded that they really were invulnerable and invisible. Now many will have to be killed to cure them of witch-doctor faith.

With a certain type too much gentleness in the beginning is a mistake. If the first Congo gentleman depending on his charm had been shot dead it would have saved the lives of many others.

THIS letter was addressed to Gordon McCreagh of our "A. A." department —until he left on his expedition into the South American jungle. The original was sent to Mr. McCreagh, but its reaching him is open to question and certainly it will be some time before he could answer it.

What *are* the real facts as to the Indian rope-trick? I've heard a most interesting explanation of why no one would perform the "trick" for the then Prince of Wales, but have a vague feeling I was asked not to talk about it. Probably I wasn't asked and I can't see why any one would ask it but—well, others of you will have heard the same thing and can tell it.

Boston, Massachusetts.

Can you give me any information concerning the Indian rope-trick?

The following is a brief from an article on this subject that was printed in an old edition of the *Strand Magazine:*

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THE late Chas. Bertram, while touring India giving magical performances before the Princes and Rajahs, made a careful study of native magic, and did not obtain anything that would substantiate the fact of it having been produced.

When the present King of England went to India, as Prince of Wales in 1902, India was scoured to find a performer that could do the trick, and there was none to be found.

Lord Lonsdale offered 10,000 shillings for a sight of it, and Messrs. Maskelyne and Devant issued a standing offer of an exceptional large sum of money to any one that would produce the trick in London, and the reward is still unclaimed.

It is written that the trick has been known as an Indian fable for at least 500 years.

HOWEVER, in spite of these reports there is one of Lieut. F. W. Holmes, V. C., that states, of not only having seen the trick performed, but that he took a photograph of its reproduction.

It was shown before him and several other officers, in May, 1907, while standing in front of his bungalow at Kirkee, which is in the vicinity of Bombay, and occurred in this manner:

An old man and a native boy approached them over the open ground. He had no pole, as an article of that kind measuring possibly 15 feet in length would have been a difficult thing to conceal. He began by unwinding a rope from around his waist and threw it upward into the air where it remained. The boy climbed to the top and descended, the old man then shook the rope gently and it fell to the ground as would any other rope that had been released.

He then coiled the rope around his waist and departed.

Another Pro. is M. F. G. Smith, stating he saw the trick performed by a native in Benares, the most sacred Hindu city in the Summer of 1896, and again at Delhi in 1897—both performances conducted by the same persons.

If the trick has been done, do you think that the religious principles of the performer would account for not claiming the large rewards? — W. E. BESSOM.

HUGH PENDEXTER'S talks about the historical material of his stories are always interesting. It is particularly gratifying that, of the great numbers of you who've written in commendation of his stories, the large majority are perhaps even more pleased by the history value of his tales than by the tales themselves. You've found that he's not only reliable and accurate in handling historical material but is a master hand at clothing the dry bones of history in living flesh.

The school texts make history a blight in the life of the average and normal boy. History, properly served up, would in most cases grip him hard. Many of you, like me, had a strong natural interest in history —killed when we went to school and were choked on dry bones. We didn't regain our interest after that, most of us, until Hugh Pendexter came along. Some of you have written that his stories sent you to the library for more or less extensive reading on subjects at last made human and interesting by him. Luckily at least part of the "grown-up" histories are pretty human themselves.

The writers of school histories have the idea that teaching history means cramming children with dates. That isn't history, but just a calendar or, at best, tabulated notes for reference. The exact date of an event is of comparatively little importance; the important things, after an understanding of the event itself, are *why* it happened and what were the *results*. Of course they touch on these things too—after choking the children on bone-dust, but the dose as a whole is a tabulation of details—too many details. In a word, the school histories lack real coordination and vision.

Hendrik van Loon has now shown them how to make history out of history, how to seize the child's interest and give him the very essence of things. I've not yet read his "Story of Mankind," but I've read his "Ancient Man" and learned more real general history from it than from any other source. A little book, written for young children! Read it and get a pleasant surprize. I hope he writes a history of the United States and that at least some of the present perpetrators of school texts will follow the trail he has blazed.

Meanwhile, have you considered what Hugh Pendexter's stories are going to be when he has finished working out his plan of covering United States history as a whole? Entirely aside from its fiction value, his books as a whole are going to be an exceedingly valuable permanent contribution to the history of this country. Among other things, they should be made supplementary reading in every grammar, high school and college history course in the land. For they do what the school texts now fail to do—make the people and events of history *alive* and *interesting*.

Here's what he has to say about "War Wampum," his serial beginning in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

One of the prominent landmarks in almost all school-histories is the account of Braddock's campaign in 1755. "Braddock's Defeat" is a familiar chapter-heading even to the scholar in the grades. It is a peculiar fact that General Braddock, whose

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stubbornness lost him his army and life, should be permanently placed in history, while the Frenchman, who won the great victory, Captain Daniel Beaujeau, should remain practically unknown. It is also peculiar that Braddock's defeat, because of the unparalleled set-back to Britain's arms, should be made so much of, while the battle of Bushy Run, *the* decisive battle of Pontiac's war, should attract minor attention. Had Bouquet's men been led by an Abercromby, a Braddock, or a Loudoun, then scarcely one of the five hundred men would have escaped death and the disaster would have ranked next to the fight on the Monongahela.

Never did the North American Indians put up a more stubborn and persistent fight against an equal number of white men than did the members of the tribes mentioned in "War Wampum" at Edge Hill, unless it be at the Point Pleasant battle in Lord Dunmore's war in '74.

I HAVE adhered very closely to history in my story. Virginia was opposed to the route selected by Bouquet for General Forbes in 1758. Colonel George Washington, in command of the Second Division and stationed at Ft. Cumberland, wrote to Bouquet, then in command of the First Division, stationed at Bedford, and urged that the Braddock road be used instead of waiting to cut through a new road. But Bouquet's proposed road was fifty miles shorter from Bedford to Duquesne (not called Pitt until after Forbes' occupation) than the Ft. Cumberland, or Braddock, road. Colonel Washington was pessimistic concerning the outcome of the campaign. In part he wrote: "All is dwindled into ease, sloth and fatal inactivity. Nothing but a miracle can bring the campaign (Forbes' campaign, '58) to a happy issue." General Forbes, weak and emaciated, but with the heart of a lion, was the commander to work the miracle. Carried on a litter he led his army through the new road and forced the French to evacuate Duquesne. It was Washington who was selected to open the last fifty miles of the road. This passing of Duquesne into the English hands, to be renamed Fort Pitt, was not unmarked by massacre, however. Major Grant with 800 Highlanders pushed on ahead of the army and occupied a hill in the rear of the fort. He could have taken the place by a surprize attack. Unpractical in this kind of fighting, he elected to make a display of his force, and the French and Indians, having recovered from their dismay, sallied out and surrounded him and shot his men down like so many sheep. Grant's Hill in the heart of Pittsburg marks the scene of this disaster.

IN THE Spring of 1763 the Indians were surrounded on the north and east by a strong line of forts, while those of Bedford, Ligonier and Pitt extended into the heart of the red man's country and threatened to drive the aborigines to the north and west, more inhospitable regions. Pontiac professed friendship for the English after Canada had been wrested from France, because he expected he would be recognized as a native ruler and would be assigned to rule over not only his own tribe, but over a confederacy of tribes. Major Robert Rogers, who was sent to take over the forts surrendered by the French, gave as his opinion in 1765 that, had the English used some sagacity in dealing with the overchief of the Three Fires, there never would have been any "conspiracy" and war. This reasoning will have its appeal to modern students of history, inasmuch as the recognition of Pontiac as native ruler would have held his people friendly to Great Britain unless the over-chief developed too great an ambition.

TAMAQUE'S chief residence was at the mouth of Beaver Creek. He spent part of his time at Kittanning. After the French lost Ft. Duquesne he moved to Ohio, near the junction of the Tuscarawas and the Big Sandy. After Bouquet's expedition to the Muskingum he made peace with the English and later was a convert to Christianity under the influence of the Moravian missionaries. He died about 1770.

The data concerning the Byerlys is largely obtained from Rev. Cyrus Cort's "Henry Bouquet." Mr. Cort's great-great-grandfather was Andrew Byerly. The little spring from which Andrew Byerly carried water in his hat to the wounded Highlanders was still flowing in 1883, and may be now for all I know to the contrary. For many years the old trees on the battle-field stood with their bullet scars and embedded pieces of lead. Mrs. Byerly's escape with her children, and her message to her husband, left on the door of the cabin, are described in this little book.

Of the fifteen people attacked in George Croghan's field within a mile of Ft. Bedford two were brought to the fort alive, although tomahawked and scalped. One of these ran and hid in Croghan's barn where he was found by a small party sent out by the garrison. Both these men died in the fort.

"Trade Knife" is a fictitious character but types certain renegades, who were more red than white. Great Island village was opposite the present Lock Haven.

I have refrained from introducing any chapters dealing with the siege of Detroit as that phase of the struggle has been dealt with generously in both fiction and history.

A MESSAGE to you from Arthur O. Friel. You'll be glad to know we have two serials of his now in our safe.

Port of Spain, Trinidad, B. W. I.

Wish you'd do me a favor. Run a line in Camp-Fire telling the gang that, as I am on the move, I can't receive or answer any letters. As you know, some of the boys write me now and then, and I always try to answer. But now I can't; and I don't want the bunch to waste postage and wonder what the Sam Hill is the matter with me. I meant to write this some time ago, but had so much other stuff in mind that I just didn't get to it. If any of the Camp-Fire crowd have written me recently I hereby apologize and promise to answer on my return to the States; provided, of course, that neither the letters nor I myself get lost permanently in the meantime. In the latter case there "won't be no answers."

I don't know how much longer I'll be helling around the tropics, but it probably will be for some months yet. This little 40 x 60 island is only a temporary roost for me, and I'll be gone before you read this.—ARTHUR O. FRIEL.

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FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, W. D. Hoffman rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. You'll be particularly interested in his having been on the scene when Pat Garrett was killed.

Berkeley, California.

Frequently I have been a listener at the Camp-Fire, not expecting to be called upon. My rôle has usually been one of auditor and spectator, as newspaper scribe, standing at the sidelines while more fortunate spirits were embroiled in adventures.

I HAVE moved about the United States some, working east and west and in Mexico. Like most newspaper men I have bumped into a few big things, a Madeira revolution, a scientific case of multiple identity, and danced with Hopi Indians for a story.

I have rubbed elbows with some interesting people, like Potato Mayor Shank of Indianapolis, Charlie Chaplin at lunch-counter before he was famous, explorers and mariners in Seattle, insurrectos. Also ambassadors, presidential candidates, prospectors in Colorado, Fort Worth gangsters, Arizona rangers, Tiajuana rurales.

I happened to be an instrument in closing the last open gambling-house in Texas and the last "Favorite" dance-hall, a stunt that resulted in the assassination of my boss.

Have dropped off a train on the New Mexico desert on the trail of honest-to-gosh cattle-rustlers.

HAPPENED to be around when Pat Garrett, slayer of Billy the Kid, was shot to death. Was on hand when the deputy who gave me the scoop about Garrett's death was himself slain in the Coney Island saloon as an aftermath.

Have seen industrial conflict, feuds, border gun-running, smuggling, cattle wars. Have covered cock-fights, badger-fights, bull-fights, bull-and-tiger fights. (The latter, seen at Juarez, may interest Camp-Firers in view of the Panama City controversy.)

I have grub-staked, nosed around stamp-mills and smelters, owned a ranch. Served as reporter, set type, been Associated Press correspondent, business manager, managing editor. Lately I have been looking over the old Bret Harte country in California.

"THE Law of Averages in Music Creek," although fiction, is a mosaic of a number of actual isolated incidents, pieced together to make a purposeful narrative. It contains an historical background that, I believe, is accurate. *Dad Primrose*, the narrator, exists, under another name, and at least up to a year ago was still living at Jamestown, California, the "Jimtown" of the mining days. He told me bits of the tale, with other things. *Dutch Charlie* is a composite of the characters of the gold-rush days who were nicknamed thus by the American forty-niners. These Hollanders, sailors who deserted their ships at San Francisco to go to the diggings, were so proverbially lucky in finding gold that many of the miners believed them possessed of some powers of magic. The divining-rod era in Hangtown and other camps lasted for some time and not a few fortune hunters were victimized by fakers who found it easier to get gold-dust from the prospectors than from the ground. The Dutch Charlies of history had a weakness for the long, weighty nugget-chain jewelry. The story attempts to make live again an almost forgotten phase of life in the days of the Argonauts.—W. D. HOFFMAN.

AT A former Camp-Fire W. C. Tuttle of our writers' brigade told of a rabbit's running away after he'd shot most of its contents out of it. Since then others of you have sent in similar experiences.

As to "Tut's" cat-tale I think he must have witheld some extenuating circumstances. Still, some cousins of mine had a similar experience. Cat tied to stake. A .22 bombardment (details forgotten) merely urged the cat to pull the stake up and take it away. A shotgun, as I remember, was called in and the cat gave up all its nine or thirteen lives.

Hollywood.

Seems like I stirred up quite a lot of rabbit argument. I'll believe anything they tell me about Molly Cottontail. I've hammered 'em with shot until you'd think they'd bog down from the weight of lead.

Is it love of life, "guts" or what is it that makes a weak critter hang onto life, when it is cut to shoe-strings? Beats me.

ONCE upon a time I tried to kill a blind cat. I don't just remember what made this cat blind. Anyway I was going to put the poor thing out of its misery.

It was on a stump. I had a .22 repeater. I'm not a crack shot, but at that time I was a fair shot, and I know I did not miss that cat. The gun contained ten shots, and I slammed every one of those bullets into that cat's head. I shot until I got ashamed of myself. Did the cat die? Answer; I went home, got a .41 Colt pistol and came back. I walked up within ten feet of that cat, blew it off the stump—and the —— thing ran away!

DON'T try to believe this. I don't ask any one to believe it, but it happened. Whether the cat died or not, I don't know, but I do know that no dead cat ever ran away as fast as that one did. I have been ashamed of it all my life. I wonder if I was two shots shy of killing it? Some say they have nine, others thirteen. I know this one died ten times by .22 and I'll swear by the destructive ability of that old .41. No, the cat did not come back. Even a cat can be insulted.—TUT.

2617 Silver Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.

The first day of the 1919 season, I went to a place outside of Oxford, Pa., called the Barrens and during the day one of the boys jumped a rabbit. I shot him with a .22 pistol and chased after him but lost him about twenty minutes later. One of the boys found one in a pile of rocks. They stood ready and I poked him out. Both of them missed him. I hit him in the rear, almost tearing one of his legs off.

He did not stop. The next one took the scalp

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off his head and stopped him but we had to kick him to put his lights out. It was the same one I hit with the .22 right through his belly and the lead took in a wad of hair as big as your thumb. That rabbit had been shot up a heap before because his ears were full of holes which had healed up and he was only about half the size of an ordinary rabbit. He was tore up so much that we had to throw him away and it wasn't a *jack rabbit* either. I can furnish proof for this.—CHAS. L. STOWERS.

WHILE it does not bear on rabbits or cats with interior fittings removed, the following does bear on rabbits. Quite a number of you have challenged Dr. Robertson's theories of shooting.

Inverary, Sutton Forest,
New South Wales, Australia.

I should like to know the brand of powder Dr. Robertson uses. It must be of very high velocity (not when he is shooting at barns). I should like to try it out on a rabbit which has just been hustled out a of a burrow by a ferret or chased by a dog, set at distance of forty-five yards, or a driven pheasant; as for the latter, traveling down-wind at forty miles an hour one aims nine feet in front of the bird. I have shot hundreds of rabbits over a ferret, use a .28 gage double-barrel shotgun. When a rabbit is going full throttle, aim nine feet ahead of him. I am not an E. but have found out the foregoing from experiences—and as for alinement I never think of it.

Perhaps the rabbits in Dr. Robertson's part of the world (if there are any) are as large as the barns he writes of, and therefore not as fast as the Australian kind.

I would not object to Dr. Robertson having a shot at one running at fifty yards with a twenty-eight-foot gage shotgun (1½-oz. shot) say for a dollar a shot.—THOMAS G. GIBBONS.

A WORD from Captain Dingle concerning an incident in the first part of his serial "A Shot at a Venture," which is concluded in this number:

Hamilton, Bermuda.

There is one point which your readers are bound to raise, so I'm going to get there first. I refer to the incident of Saunders stuffing his cigar into a gun-muzzle and thereby causing a back-fire. The thing was suggested by something that happened to me actually about the time I began the story. I was trying out a modern automatic pistol to which I had just got a new barrel fitted, and before firing it I omitted to remove a greasy rag which I kept in the muzzle to both keep out damp and keep the rifling slightly oiled. It was not in tight, simply rolled like a pencil and stuffed in.

Well, that bullet never did get out! The recoil gear stayed open, and the bullet stopped in mid-barrel and spoiled it forever with a bulge. So if you ever get a question like that, you tell 'em a simple way of baffling gun-crooks—tell 'em from me. Cheerio!—DINGLE.

PLEASE keep in mind the exact nature of our Camp-Fire Stations. Some of you have been writing to them for all kinds of information, some even for jobs, one even asked a Keeper to find him a wife. I can't think of any one who'd be the proper person to ask to find a wife for a man, and certainly finding wives for other people has nothing to do with our Stations. Nor has finding jobs for people. Nor is there any reason to ask a Keeper for information concerning a district covered by our "Ask Adventure" department.

If you want to write to a Keeper and have a sound reason for imposing on his time, go to it. *But* don't be sore, or disappointed or even surprized if you get no reply. A Keeper's only obligations beyond being decent are to display our "71" sign, keep a register-book and hold or forward mail without responsibility for said mail. He may do anything else he likes for Camp-Fire comrades, but he doesn't *have* to. Some of them are more than glad to get letters and to answer them; others have little time to spare from their own business, are glad to keep a Station for comrades who come that way, but are compelled to limit their Station activities to only such comrades as appear in person. Just because you read a man's name in our list it doesn't follow that he's shoved aside all his own affairs and interests, scrapped his business and become your property. He may be very glad to tell you anything he can, but he may not have sufficient time at his disposal. Or he may merely not like to write letters. Certainly he doesn't have to if he doesn't feel like it.

If you want to talk to him, go to where he lives and knock on his door, getting the mail and register privilege and whatever other hospitality he may blamed well feel like extending. But he's not under any obligation to run a correspondence school.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer.

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calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club or resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Alabama—50—Fairfield. Percy E. Coleman, 405 Forty-fifth St.

Arkansas—104—Pine Bluff. B. C. Jordan, 1215 E. Second St.

California—44—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 836 Seventh Ave.
28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Del. No. 2.
38—Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
80—Magalia, Butte Co., K. W. Mason.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.

Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.

Connecticut—86—New Haven. C. S. Roberts, 457 Fayerwether Hall, Yale University. Elm Street and Blount Ave.
103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.

Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 13th St. and First Ave. N. E.

Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald.*

Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.

Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.

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66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
77—Chicago. John Bradford Main, H. Company, 1st Inf. Ill. N. G., 16th St. and Michigan Ave.

Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
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59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.

Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke. 1200 E. Madison St. at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.

Massachusetts—26—Malden. Arthur R. Lloyd, 16 Cross St.
49—Pitchburg. G. R. Wyatt, 66 Lunenburg St.
111—West Medford. Stanley Clarence Lary, 21 Jackson Road, 56.

Michigan—27—Marquette. T. Mitchell, Box 864, G. P. O.
69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln. Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
80—Detroit. R. A. Taylor, 5129 Maybury Grand.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.

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94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.

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New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.

New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard, P. O. Box 13.
16—Bayonne. J. D. Gray, 92 West Sixth St.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, care of Reed, P. O. Box 431.

New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
42—Yonkers. A. F. Whegan, 173 Elm St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
93—Rochester. Thomas C. Murphy, 62 Swan St.
107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.

North Carolina—92—Asheville. B. Taylor and C M. Gravatt, The Southern Spar and Mica Co., 322 Haywood Bldg.

North Dakota—109—Stanley. Dr. W. W. Coe, Box 301.

Ohio—13—Cleveland. Wayne Eberly, 602 National City Bldg.
58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Columbus. Geo. T. Watters, 679 N. Nelson Road.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, E. Third St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water Street.

Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.

Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P.& R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
78—Pittsburg. Peter C. Szarmach, 320 Bareton St.
21—Braddock Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.

South Carolina—8—Allendale. Ed. N. Clark, Editor-owner *The Tri-County Record* and Allendale *Advance.*
97—Charleston. Jack Mette, Navy Yard.

Texas—54—Houston. M. B. Couch, Route 2, Box 189.
99—Beaumont. D. E. Jonson, 784 Orleans St.
33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 2815 Austin St.

Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building.

Washington—3—Republic. A. E. Beaumont, Box 283.
1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven, Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book Store, 1330 First Ave.
7—Mount Vernon. Ed. L. Carson.
71—Charleton. Elmer E. McLean, Box 561.

West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.

Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9, Tenny Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle St.
72—Kenosha. Leland Birchard, 304 Marion Ave.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, 52 Emmaline St., Northcote: and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Melbourne. Chas. M. Healy, "Oora," Abbott St., Sandringham.

Canada—31—Vancouver, B. C. C. Plowden, B. C. Drafting & Blue Print Co.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. Thos. Jocelyn
4—Dundedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Descronto, Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
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102—Amherst. Lloyd E. Mac Pherson, 5 Belmont St.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Auditor, No. 1 Cerro.

France—61—Paris. Walter Denman, 19 rue Auber.

Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.

Honduras, C. A.,—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.

Porto Rico—46—San Juan. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 944.

Spanish Honduras—70—Jos. Buckly Taylor, La Ceiba.

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These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Back numbers, 1916; 1918; 1920; and 1921. What offers?—Address J. P. HOUCHENS, 2550 Madison Avenue, Baltimore, Md.

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Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessay to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

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Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

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To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

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General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

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and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

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WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Once More the San Blas

NOTHING like a little controversy to air all the facts. Edgar Young's accuracy is brought into question; and, being red-headed, his comeback is prompt, vigorous and to the point:

I'm going to "crab" a bit in this letter.

I am not sure, but I believe Edgar Young is the same Young I knew several years ago in these countries. If he is the same man (or even if he isn't, for that matter) I am sure he will not take offense at my "knocking" his information in "A. A." Feeling confident that Mr. Young wants to give the most accurate information possible and believing that he has been out of touch with some of his territory for some time, I'll list a few of my objections:

In Mr. Young's answer to E. C. Clarke he states that the San Blas Indians are a self-governing tribe "of some 50,000." No census has ever been taken of these Indians, but all arguments between people best posted are as to whether there are 10,000 or less. From the best information I can get—including estimates from their own *cacique* there would not be over 10,000 and the old *cacique* would exaggerate if possible.

I take exception to the idea of a king, and a council of young men. Each village has a chief (called *sagala*) who is, more or less, absolute in that village. As an example of his rule. A man who upsets his canoe is called before the *sagala* and fined. The idea is that, as he was born to the use of a canoe, he has committed a fault by upsetting his.

The *sagala* is elected by the village. Generally he is the man who is considered most far-seeing. The post is not hereditary, though the grown son of a *sagala* naturally holds a better chance of being elected than the ordinary run of young men.

The post is not necessarily a life job. Nor does it run any specified time. Like some of their more civilized neighbors, they hold an election when they feel like it.

Over all the village *sagalas* is the chief *sagala*, generally referred to as the *cacique* (a Spanish term, I believe). All questions concerning the whole nation are always brought to him for settlement. He does not have a "*council of young men*," but does confer with the *sagalas*, and with any one else who may have something to say in the matter.

As to their order for all traders to be aboard their vessels by dark, and not being allowed to stay in the San Blas territory overnight—there is absolutely nothing to that. My best proof of that is that I have spent every night (and every day, also) in their territory for the last nine months. I have never been ordered out, nor have I ever had any trouble with them, except for their thieving and begging.

It is true that they are very jealous of their women, but it is not a fact that none of the women has ever married outside the tribe. I will take that back, perhaps they never have *married* outside the tribe, but I know of one case where a San Blas Indian lives with a Jamaican negro.

As for trading along their coast, I know of one chap who recently put in a 72-ton schooner, with auxiliary power, and invested two or three thousand dollars in trade goods and he had not yet made a trip that paid expenses. There is a lot of competition for the little trade along the coast. I may add, right here, that I am *not* in the trading-business, and

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do not say this to scare off competitors. I do as little trading as possible.

They do not like for people to cross their country, it is true, but it can be done. I spent a couple of months in the interior of their country in 1907-8, and am writing this in the interior of their country.

They do not police their borders with sentries in sight of each other. All the men of the tribe would not be sufficient to place such a patrol. I have never seen an Indian with a Winchester. The only guns they have are muzzle-loading shotguns, which they generally use in shooting iguanas—a special article of diet for them. Incidentally, it is against Panamanian law to sell them guns, powder or shot—or liquor, either.

Very little gold-dust in evidence. There is no rubber in this country. Colombian woodsmen occasionally cut chicle (base of chewing-gum) from the scattering nispero-trees along the coast.

There is no cane brandy made by them. The only drink they know how to make is *chicha*.

I have never seen vanilla or sarsaparilla here in the bush, and I am certain the Indians do not cultivate it. They cultivate corn, rice, a little cacao, raise chickens and a few hogs. Cattle and horses are unknown to them except to the few who have gone out. They have the same word in their language for cow and horse. Coconuts are practically all they have for trade.

You can bet your sweet life that Mr. Nase would have a bucketful of troubles if he didn't bother about duties before starting to trade along the coast. In the first place, one must get a license from the Panamanian Government. There is no chance to do trading along the coast by evading the laws. The Panamanian Government keeps a station on the island of Porvenir, just at the entrance of the Gulf of San Blas, another station at Rio Diablo, and still another at the Colombian border at Porto Baldea. Trading without a license, or without paying duty on the goods would result in confiscation of the boat.

Relative to ivory-nuts: They are much more plentiful in Colombia than here. The present price on ivory-nuts is so low that traders will not take them except as a favor to some Indian customer of long standing.

The San Blas do not "send out" young men to be educated. Frequently an adventurous youth ships out on some schooner, goes to the U. S. or Canada, stays a few years, learns good English, comes back, becomes a bush Indian again just as if he had never been out.

I do not mean by all the foregoing that the San Blas are a docile, harmless bunch. Far from it. They are mighty nasty *hombres* when they are full of *chicha*. They are inveterate beggars, and accomplished thieves. They probably will never be civilized for I think they will die off before civilization hits them. They were decimated a few months ago by smallpox.

Young is right about it being a long jaunt up the Amazon. Furthermore, chances for trading were mighty slim several years ago, and word I received recently from there states that there is comparatively no one living in the old *seringals* now.

I hope Young will not feel that I am knocking him. I do not write this long-winded epistle in that spirit. I feel that he has probably been out of touch for some time. I was away from the tropics for a couple of years during the war, and I certainly found conditions changed in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama when I returned.—W. E. Brandon, P. O. Box 29, Colón, Colón, Panama.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—When I used the expressions "San Blas country" and "San Blas coast" I was using standard expressions for that portion of Panama between Cape San Blas and Cape Tiburon Miel (Honey Shark) on the Colombian border and extending back inland to the top of the mountains which run down through the center of this portion of the republic. I did not coin these expressions. They were in existence before I first went to Panama and are still in existence. They are standard expressions just as "the Amazon basin," "the Chaco," "the Panhandle," are used to denote certain localities in a general way.

When an old-timer in Panama says he has been down in "the San Blas" or "the Darien" (which is a variant of the expression) no man who is well informed is misled by the term. This is an indubitable and incontrovertible fact that I can cite many authorities to uphold.

The expression has been used many times in *Adventure* and it will be used many more times in the future. It means that portion of Panama republic beginning about forty miles beyond the Canal and extending to the border of Colombia, a distance of nearly two hundred miles and ranging up to a hundred and forty miles wide. If you will scan the largest map you can find of this portion of Panama you will note many mountains, few villages, and upon asking why you will ascertain the amazing fact that although almost bordering the greatest engineering feat of the century this country is for the most part unknown and unexplored.

Bear in mind that thousands of men came to the Zone to work. They came from almost every country on the face of the globe. They were of all sorts and classes. Dozens of them came in by jungle trail from the north.

And yet, of all this vast multitude that came and went during the many years the construction work was in progress only one single man laid claim to the feat of passing down through the San Blas country. While I was trying to prove the validity of his contention he died in a hospital in New Orleans without leaving the proof. His name was Brown, and mention has been made of him in *Adventure* several times.

I, myself, who had passed through some wild country on my overland trip to the Zone, was forced to turn back from the borders of the San Blas and make the trip to Colombia by coast boat. I am not vaunting my own courage. I merely say I had made an almost superhuman trip and laughed at reports of the San Blas as I had laughed at reports concerning the Toacas, the Talamancas and other Indians in Central America and Mexico. But I returned to the Zone and went by coast boat.

I will buy a new hat and doff it to any man who can uphold a claim to having made the overland trip from the Zone to Colombia on the Atlantic side of the mountain range. This, of course, Mr. Brandon does not do. He is talking of one thing and I am talking about another.

In the same friendly spirit that he tries to correct me I will also endeavor to set him aright. That I am able to do so I will state that not only have I

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been down both coasts of this portion of Panama more than once but that when I was working various positions on the Zone I spent my spare time exploring as far as I could get by canoe and trail into this portion. In addition to that, since my connection with *Adventure* I have read everything there is in print about Central America and Panama by making assiduous search through the libraries of New York, Brooklyn and Washington.

Also I have had men write me letters, and at present I am in touch with actual traders along the San Blas coast who are as well posted as Mr. Brandon, or better. No one knows with what zealous interest I would pounce upon something new concerning these people. Now as to the details of his objections:

1. In the first place he states that the number is much less than given by me and cites the *cacique* for his estimate. This would look conclusive but for one thing. These degenerate Caribs dwelling on the Mulato Islands are the descendants of runaway natives of the West Indies. The very word *cacique* was first heard in Haiti by the early Spanish explorers.

It is true that they term themselves "San Blas Indians," but if you want to see one show signs of speed put a real San Blas from the hills after him. If there are ten thousand of these the total number of Indians on the mainland will far exceed my estimate. They have the various ports of Mandinga, Carti, Playa Grande, Playa Chico, Mono, Cuigandi, Cinti, Navagandi, Sasardi Viejo, Sasardi Nuevo, Acla (Caledonia), Carreto, Cholinaca, Pito, Armila, and the villages of Tiburon Miel. There are also other villages up the following rivers: Mandinga, Samgandi, Carti Diablo, Concepcion, Playa, Caguera, Monos, Grande, Cuiti, Tres Bocas, Navagandi, Anachuna, and other smaller creeks.

In addition we have the Carib settlements on the other islands beyond the Mulatos and several San Blas settlements on the headwaters of the Rio Chepo and Tuyra which flow into the Pacific. All of these people it is legitimate to class as San Blas Indians according to the existing nomenclature. I am not trying to drag in the Chucunaques, who own the Pacific side of the country; but it is an actual fact that many San Blas canoes are also found in the Pacific.

I am not talking hearsay. I have seen them up to twelve feet beam, and I attended a San Blas dance on the island of Toboga in Panama Bay. Many authorities class all Indians beyond the Zone as San Blas, and I can cite a book by a man who put in fourteen years exploring the country before he wrote his book; but I do not consider it necessary to enter into further details along this line.

2. Now as to the word "king" I used. It is a good English word. It certainly is as appropriate as the Carib word *cacique* used by Mr. Brandon. If he will look up the old files of the *Star and Herald* or the *Panama Journal* he will note that he was called "King Carlos" and he will see a photo of him. I was there for some time after this and heard no question made over the word. It seems a case of splitting hairs.

It is the same with the term for village chief, where he rings in the Carib word *sagala*. Neither of the two words he substitutes is a San Blas word. So far as I am concerned I care nothing for the customs of these island-dwelling degenerates and class them along with the *cholos* of the Zone environs.

3. About the orders to get back on the boat. Try some of the mainland ports down near Honey Shark Point. Also look up records of the Zone authorities having to send after some employees down there who did not know the customs.

4. Glad you found one exception to the rule about the marrying out of the tribe. Is she a full blooded San Blas or a Carib? A few who tried it previously were followed and killed. At any rate have it your way.

Same about the trading. I know two who did make money.

Same about policing the borders. Try going in from the Zone side and you may butt up against a Woonchoostre of 1887 vintage.

I said that it would be best to pay the duties, didn't I? However, I have seen men stay on board and trade and let the native get his stuff ashore the best he could. I have also seen this in Rio de Janeiro Bay. You seem to have "got by" some way down there. Nase might do so also.

5. Now, about the young men being sent out to be educated. Last Summer I met at Coney Island five San Blas men who told me they were going to school here. I was in company with several friends and told them that these boys were San Blas and accosted them. They spoke very good English and were well dressed.

I had often heard that they sent them out, but this experience confirmed the report. If there is a San Blas who happens to read this I wish he would pipe up and let us know.

6. No, I don't think you are trying to "knock me," but you seem to want to put a feather in your cap at my expense. If you really want to help me I would like to get some real dope on the San Blas such as language, tribal customs, etc., which you fail to give.

I care nothing about degenerate Caribs, and I am quite sure you are not the only living man who has penetrated the San Blas country. Why man, we dug sand for the canal farther down the coast than you are speaking about. Uncle Sam had cranes and a locomotive at Nombre de Dios and dredges below there. Fact!

Jungle grows up mighty quick, and you may have been pioneering in places where there were Government quarters a few years ago. I hate to have to tell you all this, but "you picked on me."

The full statement of the "Ask Adventure," as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

A Hunting Vacation in Maine

NOW that the annual subject of vacations is coming up ——

Question:—"I wish to spend a ten-day hunting vacation in Maine in November, hunting for bear, moose, deer and some of the small game. I would like for you to send me a pamphlet of the game laws of Maine, and give me the information about bringing the game shot in Maine back into Pennsylvania. I would like to know the cost, name and address of a guide for a period of ten days. There will be four in the party.

I would like for you to send me a good map of Maine with the hunting district plainly marked out;

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also with your ideas about the best part of the State to go. I use a Springfield service rifle that has been put on a sporting stock. Is this rifle permitted by the State of Maine?"—J. HARRY WOODING, Philadelphia, Penn.

P.S.—I will send money for pamphlet of game laws and map if you will tell me the price of the same.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—If you will write to the Commissioner of Fish and Game, at Augusta, Maine, he will send you a copy of the Fish and Game Laws, free of charge. There is no open season on moose in the State this year, but you can hunt deer, bear and other game. In the open season you can ship your game to Philadelphia without any trouble, as tags from your hunting license take it along all right. A hunting license will cost $15. The season opens October 1 and closes December 1.

A guide will cost from $3 to $5 per day and his board.

There is a whole lot of good hunting territory in the State, and I am enclosing a small map of some of the territory along the line of the B. & A. R.R. I think more game is shipped from this section than from any other part of the State.

Any rifle is permitted in hunting, and the Springfield ought to be all right.

You can get a large map of Northern Maine's hunting section by sending $1 to Dillingham Co., Book Store, Bangor, and asking for Sportsman's Map of Northern Maine.

There are a number of good camps where hunters can get good accommodations and guides in the above section.

I will gladly arrange the same for you when you get ready to come.

West African Coast Dope

AND handy stuff it is to have around:

Question:—"I am taking advantage of the *Adventure* Service Bureau offer in writing to you asking for information about the West African coast.

Fourteen months ago I left the States on this ship, hit the West African coast at Dakar and called at fourteen ports down as far as Lagos. Returned New York in June and set out again in July, making Dakar again and thirteen ports as far down as Akkra, then returned to France; and as my heading shows we are *en route* for New York now and should arrive about December 14.

You may know what I have seen of the African coast; but now I wish to get some sound facts relating to the history, society, commercial life and general information a man could use going there to trade or work the lumber.

No doubt you are interested in this part of Africa; allow me to share your interest, for certainly it is a new field for American enterprise.

If it is not convenient for you to dwell on my requested subject-matter a few references on standard reading-matter will be gratefully received.

Certainly any of my experiences are at your command to be released.

Please do not publish my address or name." ——, S. S. *Tuckanuck*, at sea.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—Very welcome was your letter telling of your recent trips to West Africa. What memories it conjured up! How I think of being driven through the pounding surf of Akkra by the singing Krumen! I am glad, too, to find another interested in the coasts.

I take it that you did not get much time ashore, at least not time enough to run up into the interior.

It is not easy to give "general information and sound facts relating to history, trade, social life, etc., of the coasts," as that would mean the writing of many books. But answering the major point, or question: A white should not cast himself loose in West Africa without employment secured. At the same time, the trading companies of the Niger would not turn down a likable man who applied for work. For one thing, the whites don't like a white roaming around unemployed and broke, as it breaks down the prestige of the whites before the blacks.

You mention work in lumber. When I was there we shipped out a little mahogany, but hardly enough to show in the trade returns of Nigeria. If you hit the coast again and touch Lagos, look around for a job on the Lagos-Nigeria Railway, or talk with the traders. But I would not advise that if you are following any profession or trade aboard ship. The best lay is to stay with one's own trade.

At Akassa and Burutu (Forcadoes River, Niger Delta) there are small shipyards and machine-shops where a man knowing anything of mechanics would be taken on as a kind of foreman over colored help, with a much freer life than one can get at home.

The best book on the natives is "The Lower Niger and Its Tribes," by Major Leonard (Macmillan Co.); order through any bookseller, price two and a half dollars. Major Leonard got behind the blacks as no other white ever did. It is a book to read slowly and think over. A most marvelous book, and one that would fill in off-watch at sea, fascinating beyond description, if you are interested in native life, beliefs, superstitions, in a scientific way.

In all public libraries there is a shelf of books on West Africa, dealing with its phases, but not going much into the trade and opportunities. To be frank, the opportunities are not very good, the field being hogged by large companies; and the chances for an ambitious young man to push ahead is not nearly so good as they are in the States.

Are you on a U. S. Shipping Board boat? I would be interested to hear of any unusual experience or happening you bumped into on the coasts.

Now don't forget to take Leonard's book with you on your next sailing. You'll get a hundred dollars' worth of information out of it, and enlightenment on many strange phases of human experience.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Cougars of Vancouver

THEY'RE also known as pumas or panthers. And even if you don't get one you will have had a bully trip, with lots of hunting and fishing, and scenery that will knock your eye out:

Question:—"A party of four (including myself) are figuring on a big hunting-trip for big game. I am writing you for information regarding Vancouver Island as a prospective place to go for big game.

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The four of us go deer-hunting each season; that is the extent of our big game hunting.

We understand that cougars are plentiful on Vancouver Island. Do you think that we are experienced enough to tackle cougar-hunting? And is it necessary to employ guides?

Can you give me information on best way to get there from Seattle, Wash? What town would you suggest for base for supplies? How far would we go approximately from base of supplies to hunt cougars? What would the necessary equipment comprise for such a trip?

What would be the nearest town to buy equipment? Would it be possible to make the trip to actual hunting-grounds by motor car? What would be the best time of year for such a trip?

Please tell me something of the customs regulations.

Please tell me something of the cougars.

Please tell me something of the climate.

Would you consider this a dangerous proposition, providing we were properly equiped for cougar-hunting?"—H. W. Boyd, Waco, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—If your letter had been a little longer in reaching me the cougars would have all been dead before you had a chance to help bump them off. It arrived at last, however; so I will get busy with a few replies or rather replies to a few of your questions.

Vancouver Island is a very good place to which to go for hunting and fishing, expecially the latter.

Cougars are comparatively plentiful; but you can not drive along the roads and shoot them from a flivver. Your letter tells me that you do not know what a cougar looks like, and yet you ask me if I think you are experienced enough to hunt cougars. I do, for if a cougar tackled you he would be asked so many questions he would run for his cussed life.

Take steamer from Seattle to Victoria, thence by boat either to Courtenay or Campbell River.

Yes, get a guide by all means. He knows the country and may save you days of chasing around in the wrong territory. He can also help you as to outfit and will save you the cost of his wages by not taking things that would be of no use to you.

Go in September or October, when you will find a climate second to none on earth with a scenery background to match. You may have a slight frost at night if you get up into the hills for any distance, but nothing to be unpleasant.

The customs regulations permit you to bring in your own guns and so forth, providing you deposit an amount equal to the amount of the duty on same. This will be returned to you providing you come back inside of six months with the same articles you took in. They are very reasonable at the border and will make no trouble for you providing you answer their questions in a straightforward manner.

Write the Chief Game Warden, Vancouver, B. C., for a copy of the game laws and a Game Bulletin. You will get a lot of information from the latter as well as a rather pretentious souvenir.

Now to make amends for the joshing I gave you at the start.

If you have a car that can stand the pace, that is the way to come with Vancouver, B. C., as your objective. Here take the steamer—take your car along to Nanaimo. Ask a few questions here, get in touch with Chief Stevenson if you can, and you will learn whether to go to Courtenay or Alberni. Billy Quinn is another good scout who will give you straight talk.

Then get hold of some trapper and start for the hunting-grounds. If somebody has not shot "Dynamite" MacDonald he would be a good man; but there are plenty of others. Follow the advice of your guide and you can not fail to have a good trip. There are plenty of deer, bear and oodles of other game; but you should get a cougar each if things have not changed wofully in the past three years.

Cougars are peculiar cusses, but there are few authentic cases on record where an unmolested cougar has attacked a man. The mothers are dangerous, but they are all cowardly. Being cats, they are rather hard to kill; but an ordinary shot with a fairly good rifle has nothing to fear.

Samoa—American and Australian

THE former has the best harbor of the Pacific; the latter the most fertile land thereabout:

Question:—"I am applying to you for information relating to Samoa in general, and to Pago Pago and Apia, thereof, in particular. Myself and a young fellow, are desirous of going to Samoa. I would be glad if you would give me all the information possible about it, such as climate, conditions for Europeans, industries if any, etc.

My mate and I have a small capital, $1,000 each, and would like to go to any place in Samoa which you think would be the most suitable. I hold an engineer's ticket (mechanical) and my mate is a good all-round carpenter. We could turn our hands to anything at a pinch."—Frank Porter, Brisbane, Australia.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Samoa, which takes about twelve days to reach by steamer from Sydney, *via* Fiji, is an awkward proposition just now owing to the changes resulting in New Zealand taking over the islands under mandate from Germany. But American Samoa is a different proposition, the area of the latter being more limited, and therefore more settled under United States direction.

You and your mate might have a good chance if you go to the capital of the American group, Pago-Pago (pronounced, strange to say, Pango-Pango). Almost entirely land-locked, Pago-Pago is one of the finest and most beautiful harbors in the world.

Apia was the capital of German Samoa (now New Zealand territory) and if the Germans were chagrined at the time of the division of the Samoan group among the British, Americans and Germans, in failing to get the finest of all the harbors in the Pacific, besides the safest anchorage (Pago-Pago), Fritz certainly was allotted the richest and most fertile of the isles of the South in Upolu, upon which Apia is situated. Apia is the home of most of the white people in the Samoan group, and perhaps the present stage of transition might prove favorable to you and your mate, especially as you are prepared to be handy men about the place.

But if you were to make inquiries on the waterfront in Brisbane you would learn more about your prospects among the South Sea Islands than

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I can give you in a few lines of writing. For in Port Brisbane there are men who go down to the Pacific in ships regularly, and they can put you wise to the real position in these changeful days of mandates and falling prices. *Kia ora!* (which is good Maori for good luck!)

Books About Shipping

HERE'S a handy thumb-nail bibliography:

Question:—"Please tell me titles of the best books to be read and where to get them covering your ground for *Adventure*. I would be very glad to be able to speak interestingly of these subjects."—NORBERT COTE, Willet, Ont., Can.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—You would have to get a considerable library from which to acquire any working knowledge about the entire range of subjects on which I am presumed to furnish information. As a starter, on one branch of the subject I would recommend that you read, "Story of the American Merchant Marine," by Abbott, published by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York; "Steamships and Their Story," by Fletcher, published by J. B. Lippincott Co.; "Sailing-Ships and Their Story," by E. Keble Chatterton; "Ships and Ways of Other Days," by Chatterton; "Men of the Merchant Service," by Bullen. These, and the sea stories of Clark Russell, Conrad, Bullen, Herman Melville and Dana, will give you some insight into sea life. Your local bookseller can get these for you, or as many of them as you may desire.

Pearl-Fishing in the Gulf of California

CROWNED heads, take notice:

Question:—"I am interested in several articles on pearl-fishing in the Gulf of California, so please tell me all you can regarding the same.

Enclosed 5 cents in U. S. stamps."—JOSEPH SOUSA, New Haven, Conn.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—Pearl-fishing is one of the most important and picturesque occupations in Lower California. Extensive beds of pearl-bearing oysters are found near La Paz and along the entire west coast of Mexico, from shortly south of Guaymas to Salina Cruz, near the Guatemala line; but the headquarters of the fishing-fleet is at La Paz. The pearl-fishing season along the gulf side of Lower California begins in July and ends in October, and that on the Pacific coast begins in March and ends in June, at the commencement of the rainy season.

Two or more divers will sometimes work more than a fortnight to harvest a ton of the pearl oysters. The mature divers used to the peculiar and trying conditions bring the shells to the surface in wire baskets.

One American concern some years ago, before their concession was canceled, employed about a thousand men and half a dozen schooners of about one hundred tons burden.

Modern diving-suits are used; and clad in these the divers sometimes remain for hours at the bottom, looking for pearl oysters. These are not found in beds, but in groups of from two to six or seven, attached to rocks at the bottom. The most of the diving is done at about five fathoms or thirty feet, although some divers go as deep as eighteen fathoms. This occupation is very hard on the divers, and they only last a few years, then retiring with shattered nerves.

Independent divers, who work without diving-suits, descend by attaching a heavy stone to a rope, which they go down on by pulling themselves down. They have to work rapidly, as fifty seconds is all they can stay under. Sharks and mantas or immense rays often bother the divers, and altogether it is no child's play.

The predominating color of the pearls found is white, but blue, black, green, and multicolor pearls are often found. The shapes are as varied as the colors. Pearls with a golden blush, or with a faint bluish or rose tint, are esteemed above the ordinary white pearls. The price of a good pearl ranges from one hundred dollars to one thousand dollars Mexican silver. Many splendid pearls have been found in these fisheries.

After the conquest many priceless gems were found and sent to Spain. Of the amounts of pearls secured by the Spaniards no records exist. Pedro Sepulveda, governor of the pearl-fisheries of New Spain, reported in 1715, that the total shipments of pearls to Madrid that year were 1,280 ounces. It is believed that the splendid pearls possessed by the Spanish Crown, the rare and immensely valuable pearls in the possession of the Emperor of Austria and many of the finest crown jewels of Europe, were drawn from the fisheries of Lower California.

One of the largest pearls ever found in the waters of the gulf measured about three-quarters of an inch in diameter, and was sold in Paris to the Emperor of Austria for ten thousand dollars. A black pearl in the possession of Napoleon III. came from La Paz. It was valued in Madrid at twenty-five thousand dollars and was presented to the French Goverment by Spain.

A magnificent rose pearl found in the eighteenth century brought fifty thousand dollars in Europe. In 1881 a black pearl weighing twenty-eight carats was found near La Paz, and was sold in Paris for ten thousand dollars. In 1882, two splendid specimens of pearls were found one weighing thirty-two, the other forty-five carats, and they were sold for eleven thousand dollars.

In 1883, a light-brown pearl, a very unusual tint, was found near La Paz, weighing sixty-five carats, and was sold for eight thousand dollars.

The finest pearls find their way to Paris and Mexico City. The production in 1908 was valued at $3,000,000 silver. Pearl-shell was exported that year to the value of $2,000,000.

The pearl-shell produced in Mexico is not as good as that of the South Seas and is used principally for making buttons, most of it being exported to Hamburg and Bremen. During the war some was sent to the U. S. As a rule the shell pays the expenses of the voyage, and any pearls found are the profit. Of late years considerable fishing has been done in the vivinity of Port Angel, in the State of Oaxaca.

The principal firms engaged in pearl fishing are Antonio Ruffo y Cia., Sucs.; Miguel Cornejo, and several smaller outfits.

Unless full return postage is enclosed, no reply.

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Employment for Americans Abroad

MR. BINDA has had us print up the following notice as a circular for free distribution. Surely the matter is important enough:

National Foreign Trade Council,
India House, Hanover Square,
New York.

I HAVE had a number of inquires regarding the advisability and possibility of Americans obtaining employment in foreign countries. Although it would be of great help to the American foreign trade to have as many of our nationals as possible living abroad and requiring American goods, under the present condition of affairs as prevalent throughout the world I strongly advise against any one leaving this country to seek employment abroad, unless such a person has sufficient funds to enable him to travel and live in any foreign country for at least six months.

Moreover, I am of the firm opinion, and I have received this information from many sources, that it would be foolhardy for any Americans to attempt to obtain employment in foreign countries. Conditions abroad are such that there is scarcely enough for the native who is able to live at a considerable less expense than the American workman, and it stands to reason that the native would get the first preference for any position.

Of course, if a man is being sent out under contract by an American firm I would advise him to take the opportunity even though the prospects may not be as good as those obtainable at home. The experience obtained would be more than worth the difference. A good technical man also stands a better opportunity, but if a man has had no special training and does not know the language of the country to which he desires to go, my advice is for him to stay right here for the present at least.—JOHN L. BINDA.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

Raising Grapefruit in Isle of Pines

AGAIN the advice is: Investigate in person before you let loose of any money:

Question:—"I am anxious to obtain some information as to the advisability of a trip to the Isle of Pines, Cuba, W. I. My principal object is to purchase or lease some ground to grow grapefruit. Does it require much experience for the above? I may mention that I have had no experience in that line. Is there any occupation except growing at which there is a fair chance to make a good profit?

How is the climate and general living-conditions? Can you give me any information regarding colonization? I have located a colonization agency here in Philadelphia but have been unable to obtain any information, as the place appears to be closed."—WILLIAM A. MILLER, West Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—So many people merely think of the Isle of Pines as a pleasant land where one only has to watch the grapefruit grow. I have heard a pitiful number of disappointed men grouse about the losses they sustained down there, so that I can only refer you to the American Consul's printed reports, which the State Department at Washington will send you on application.

In short, he says there is little or nothing to do there except grow citrus fruits and vegetables. Some knowledge of growing things is of course necessary. All soil needs fertilizing in the island, and capital is needed to carry on until results accrue.

Land costs from $25 to $75 per acre. And, chief drawback of all—leaving out destructive hordes of ants—is the poorly served market for produce.

My own experience, that of men I have talked to, and that of the American Consul down there all go to show that nobody ought to think of taking up land in the island without first going down there to see for himself what conditions are. There are innumerable agencies, which are no more reliable than those selling town lots in the Florida swamps, and should be avoided. The State Department, or the Pan-American Union, both at Washington, D. C., are your best sources of information.

Dragon's Blood and Gamboge

BOTH are items in both the drug and paint trades:

Question:—"Please give me all the information you can about the two products, dragon's blood and gamboge. How procured, where found and from what trees, etc."—F. N. PERRIN, Waterloo, Iowa.

Answer, by Capt. Giddings:—Although I have lived and traveled in the East, I have little knowledge of the two products you mention, and consequently am unable to give you the information first hand.

Dragon's blood. A red-colored resin obtained from the plant *calamus draco,* one of the rattan palms. The fruit is round, pointed and scaly, the size of a large cherry, and is coated when ripe with the resinous exudation known as dragon's blood. Used for medicinal purposes as an astringent, but principally used for coloring varnishes and lacquers. Obtained almost wholly from Socotra, a British island in the Gulf of Aden, or rather at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden.

Gamboge. (I am able to give you a little first-hand information on this.) It is also a gum resin obtained from a tree indigenous to Cambodia and portions of Siam. I am under the impression that the juice is contained in the bark of the tree in many ducts in its middle layer.

The bark is tapped and a bamboo tube inserted which takes the flow of the exudation. This is a most violent cathartic, and consequently in these times is used as a pigment and as coloring-matter for lacquers and varnishes. On the market you will find it appearing in cylindrical pieces, called pipe gamboge; also in cakes, this latter usually being an inferior quality. Its color is a dark orange, and it is brittle—altogether not unlike the familiar resin.

Might state that a kind of dragon's blood is also gathered in the Canary Islands and Mexico. Not having ever seen these varieties, I am unable to give you any information.

Free service, but we don't pay the postage to get it to you.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HAUCK, GEORGE. Last seen in September, 1919. Any information concerning him will be appreciated—Address GLADYS HAUCK, 3813 Tulane Ave., New Orleans, La.

BELGIAN. Your friends of Fresno and the Hetch Hetchy, Eddie and Art, would appreciate hearing from you.—Address A. L. BOND, care of *Adventure.*

KASIMIR, HAJI. When last heard of he was on his way to India to fight the British. Please communicate with DOUGLAS S. CATCHIM, 3423 Brown St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

KING, CAPT. BILLIE. Was last heard of aboard ship on his way to Mexico. Have interesting news for you. Please communicate with DOUGLAS S. CATCHIM, 3423 Brown St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

PALMER, ARTHUR. Age thirty-eight. Last heard from in 1914. At that time was staying at 416 or 409 Yeseler Way, Seattle, Washington. Is supposed to have gone to Alaska or the Yukon. In 1912 or 1913, was working for the Washington Iron Works, Seattle, as a boiler maker. Any information will be appreciated by his brothers and sisters.—Address FRANK PALMER, care of CHESTER T. QUIGLEY, Victoria St., Duluth, Minn., or HERBERT PALMER, 83 Congregation St., Montreal, Canada.

LEE, PRESTON. Sgt. in 145th Inf. during war. Lived in Cleveland prior to that time. Probably living in Philadelphia at present. Any information will be appreciated.—Address GEORGE SCHWEMLER, 3157 93rd St., Cleveland, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in either the May 20th or May 30th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

ABRANNO, WESTLY; Arkern, Horace; Arbuckle, Louis McLane; Bennett, Joseph; Bosse, Henry; Brautigan, Jack; Brent, C. G.; Brooks, Edward, Dr.; Carroll, Arden A.; Case, Don; Chapline, Clyde; Coffman, Ralph B.; Conner, Justin Chas.; Cox, Sherman W. and Austin; Grezense, Lawrence; Hinds, George; Hitter, "Flip;" Huff, Ray and sister Vera; Hukill, Eugene S.; Johnson, Norman LeRoy; Knight, W. V.; La Porte, Harry; Lewey, Harry F.; Lewis, Arthur C.; Macauley or McCauley, Dudley; Mansfield, Robert Allen; Merz, Alfred; Napier, Harry; Olson, Lawrence T.; Penavin George; Perry, Ernest F.; Pouers, Gertrude Mrs.; Prunty, Peter, Private; Reid, Jack E.; Rumpf, George A.; Sharpe, Cecil; Shaw, Robt. E.; Smith, Albert Ernest; Thompson, Irvin L.; Tokas, Basil; Truffer, Frank; Vaughan, Jas.; Washbroad, Tommy; Wilburth, Harry; Willis, Sam; Wislin, Joseph and Harry; Yagner, Sam.

MICELLANEOUS—Would like to hear from any member of the 14th Battalion R. M. R., Canadian Army, who was acquainted with Raymond Kearns, who died in action Easter Monday, 1917, at Vimy Ridge; Sailors who occupied Barracks 948 E., Camp Farragut, Great Lakes, Illinois, between the dates of January 10, 1919, and January 30, 1919, can help a disabled gob by writing to LAURENCE K. HYDE, 3324 Aldrich Ave., South, Minneapolis, Minn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JUNE 20TH ISSUE

Besides the two complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE SWAN SONG OF KNIFE-EDGE HARRINGTON — ***Robert Simpson***
West African savages—guns—and a white man.

THE MANTLE OF THE PROPHET — ***Romaine H. Lowdermilk***
Rebels and drought on the border.

PEARLS OF GREAT PRICE — ***Chester L. Saxby***
Mutiny and booze on the high seas.

ANOTHER PAWN FOR FATE — ***F. St. Mars***
Between lasso and prairie fire.

WAR WAMPUM A Five-Part Story Part II — ***Hugh Pendexter***
The search for the Indians' prisoner.

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH — ***Alan Sullivan***
Wolves, ice, blindness—the battle of three men.

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T BE KING — ***Thomas McMorrow***
"*Bon-Fire*" beats 'em for the beans.

THE BEACH OF FRIENDSHIP — ***Kenneth Howell and Philip F. Tusting***
A sealing-voyage and the fight of a lifetime.

ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE — ***George E. Holt***
From Tangier to Gibraltar—*T. Atkins* walked it!

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